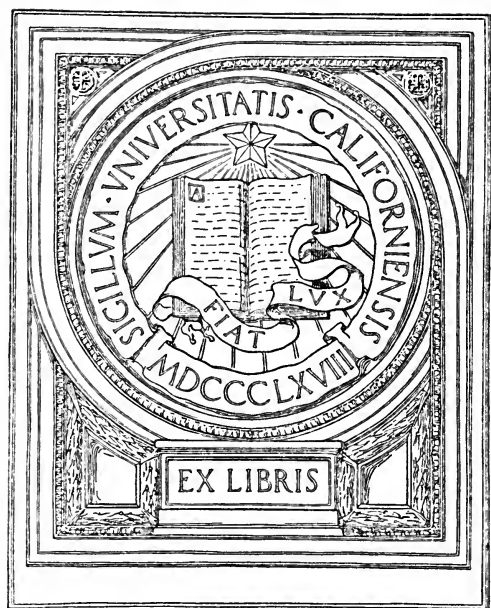


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THE
RIVAL CHIEFTAINS:
OR, THE
BRIGANDS OF MEXICO.

A Tale of
SANTA ANNA AND HIS TIMES.



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**BY HARRY HAZEL,**

AUTHOR OF 'THE BURGLARS,' 'BELLE OF BOSTON,' 'NUN OF ST.  
URSULA,' ETC.

*Justin Jones*

BOSTON:  
GLEASON'S PUBLISHING HALL, 1 1-2 TREMONT ROW.  
1845.

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# THE RIVAL CHIEFTAINS.

## CHAPTER I.

**MEXICAN EVENTS. A DEEP BARRANCA. OUR HERO IN DISGUISE. ATTACK AND CONFUSION OF THE ROBBERS. CAVALIERS OF NUNEZ. THE BANDITTI. THE FRIENDLY ENCOUNTER.**

MEXICO—the land of revolutions, as it may be justly termed—has, ever since its invasion by the hardy Spaniards, presented a more prolific field for writers of fiction than perhaps any other country on the globe; and for abundance of *materiel* the romancer need not go back to the days of Montezuma and Cortez, or even to the era of the extinction of the Spanish dominion, but merely turn to events which have transpired within his own memory—to the seven revolutions which have succeeded each other in rapid succession since eighteen hundred and twenty one, and which the novelist has left almost untouched. The colossal and romantic grandeur of the scenery of the country—the peculiar character of its people—the magnificence and wealth of its cities—the lawless bands of free rovers who infest its forests and mountains—all combine to throw a sort of enchantment over it, to the minds of those who are conversant with the history of the El Dorado of the New World.

The prominent events of the few past years lend an additional interest to this ill-fated country; events which have been characterized by as bloody and cruel deeds as ever blackened the pages of Mexican or Spanish history. We need but refer to the *grito de libertad* of Santa Anna and Victoria in eighteen hundred and twenty two, or to the horrible scenes of the *Acordada* six years subsequent, or to the three revolts of a later date; and in a year

or two more, another undoubtedly will be recorded; and thus will it continue until a Napoleon or an Alexander rises up and assumes absolute power. At every change of government it becomes necessary for hundreds of officers and soldiers, who are attached to the defeated party, to flee from the tyranny of those in power, and to seek refuge in the mountains and forests, where they organize themselves into banditti, and become a terror to all travellers. In some instances they have even been known to be allied with some of the officers of state, and thus are enabled to rob and even murder with impunity by day as well as by night.

The scene of the introductory incident to our tale lies at the foot of Mount Orizava, or the Star-Mountain as it is frequently called. A deep ravine, dark and dreary, through which the road is cut, has to be passed before the ascent to the mountain-gorge. On one side inaccessible cliffs rear their rugged heads, while on the other a dense forest of lofty pines spread their branches to the sky. It is, indeed, a gloomy place, and the many rude crosses placed upon each side of the road, tell tales of horrible and murderous scenes which have here been enacted, and by travellers it is considered the most dangerous point to be passed on the whole route from Vera Cruz to the capital.

The sun had receded about two hours from the meridian on a fine clear day in mid-summer, and illumining with her bright gleams the snowy peaks which rise up in towering grandeur and sublimity at every view, as a single horseman mounted upon a large raw-boned looking steed, was wending his way leisurely and unconcernedly through the fearful ravine already alluded to. A coarse Mexican *chaqueta* hung loosely over his shoulder, and his legs were encased in a ragged pair of *calzoneras*, while upon his head he wore an old *gacho* or *sombrero*, which our fashionable hatters would have pronounced 'shocking bad,' could it have passed under their inspection. He looked a veritable beggar upon a stolen horse. He had proceeded but a few rods through the ravine, when he dropped the bridle upon the horse's neck and took from the holsters of his saddle a pair of silver mounted pistols, which he inspected carefully and replaced them. From under his *chaqueta* he drew forth a long double-edged sharp-pointed *mahaja* and thrust it into a leathern girdle that was buckled around his waist. This precaution being taken he drew in the reins of his steed, and his uncouth beast started off with an ambling pace that would have excited the commiseration of any piece of horse-flesh that could have been produced. He had reached an abrupt turning point in the road, when a couple of dark fierce-looking bandits, mounted upon high-mettled steeds, suddenly darted from the wood, and seizing the bridle of his horse, commanded him to dismount.

'Who so bold as to molest a peaceful traveller?' demanded the stranger in an undaunted tone and manner, drawing his pistols.

'Dismount caballero!' said one of the robbers. 'You have gold, notwithstanding your ragged attire. But methinks you wear a better inside,

for no beggar could sport a pair of richly mounted pistols like unto those you hold in your hands.'

'Who art thou?'

'Come, Senor, your gold! We would not harm you!'

'Again I ask, who dare obstruct my path?' said the stranger resolutely.

'The followers of Don Manuel Manrique!' returned one of the robbers, as if he expected that the name of the Brigand Chief would strike the traveller with awe!

'Ay! Don Manuel Manrique!' reiterated the stranger. 'The famed Bandit of the Black Forest! The terror of the whole valley of Mexico! I've heard much of this celebrated robber! But I fear him as little as I do his unscrupulous lieutenant, José Garcilazo!'

'Sante Maria! The fellow knows you, Garcilazo!' said his comrade.

'Si, my fine lads, but no better than I know Ricardo De Vega, the boldest *ladrone* in the region of Orizava and the Coffre de Perote!' added the traveller.

The Brigands seemed staggered on hearing their names announced by the fearless stranger. They receded a few steps backward and assumed a more respectful bearing.

'May I ask your name?' said Garcilazo.

'Alvorado Nunez!'

'Alvorado Nunez!' reiterated both of the bandits, at the same time touching their *gachos* with profound respect.

'Colonel Nunez here? and in so mean a disguise?' resumed Garcilazo. 'We heard but two days ago you and your force entered the city of Guatemala with the brave Carrera, after a successful campaign against Morazan!'

'True! but my movements it is known are somewhat expeditious!—Tell me, Garcilazo, does Manrique and his troop of Bandits now occupy the Black Forest?'

'Si, Senor, and he will give his gallant cousin a cordial welcome.

'Where are your brave cavaliers, Colonel?' asked Ricardo De Vega.

'You shall see!' replied Nunez, and applying a post horn to his lips, he blew a signal blast, which was answered from the farther end of the barranca, and soon a company of cavalry, consisting of one hundred men, well mounted, suddenly issued from the forest, and came galloping at full speed towards their heroic leader.

'By San Pedro! a noble looking troop!' exclaimed Garcilazo.

'The most formidable company of horse in all Mexico!' rejoined De Vega.

The robbers spake truly; for the whole force of the Republic could not boast of a nobler or a better disciplined corps of cavaliers. It was composed of young and gallant fellows, most of whom were allied to the best families of Mexico, and who, having opposed the *pronunciadors*, or revolutionizers, and adhered to the unfortunate Bustamente, were either banished or fled for safety on Santa Anna's coming into power. Their chosen leader, Alvorado Nunez, was a Colonel in the army of Bustamente, and accompan-

led the deposed President to Spain, where many noble Mexicans with him sought refuge. Here was suggested and planned the organized force we have brought so suddenly before the reader. Before leaving Spain they supplied themselves with cavalry uniforms and equipments, which they conveyed secretly to the mountain retreats of Mexico, where they were thoroughly disciplined by Alvarado Nunez. In this romantic region of country they resolved to roam, and intercept the government treasures which might fall in their way between the coast and the capital, until they might co-operate with any new pronunciadors to overthrow the usurper. Although some of the corps occasionally levied contributions on travellers, yet such conduct met the decided reprehension of their chief. Manrique, not liking to be confined to the fastidious notions of his superior officer, withdrew from him and formed a company which he styled the Independent Rovers, and whose deeds on the highway were of a most atrocious character. Nunez, fearing that these acts of his cousin might be attributed to him, resolved to abandon that section of country. Accordingly he made overtures to General Carrera, the renowned Gautemalian patriot, and with his cavaliers united himself with the undisciplined followers of this successful leader. Manrique and Nunez had parted on seemingly friendly terms, and up to this time had not met for more than a year.

The cavaliers of Nunez were now paraded in a line extending nearly half the distance of the barranca, and they presented not only a formidable but a beautiful and orderly appearance. They were mounted on white steeds, neatly and even richly caparisoned. Their chaquetas were of green velvet, embroidered with silver thread and striped with silver lace, with rows of bell buttons, of the same metal, placed closely together; the breeches were of black velvet, striped with gold lace. Their caps, also, were of velvet, with a gold band, and tassels of bullion extending nearly to the left shoulder. A scarlet sash and leathern belt were fastened around the waist, to which were appended Spanish swords and carved-handle mahajas. Light carbines were swung to their backs, and the holsters of their saddles were fully supplied with pistols. Indeed, no corps of light cavalry had ever been seen in Mexico that would favorably compare with them since the country was hailed as a republic.

'Now, Señors Garcilazo and De Vega,' who were gazing with admiration on the cavalcade before them, 'I would see your chief.'

'Si, Colonel,' replied Garcilazo. 'You have but to follow me at a quick pace for half an hour. I fear our cavalry will make a sorry appearance in contrast with yours; but our quarters are well supplied with solid comforts, and you and your troop will be cordially welcomed. These things will doubtless recompense for a more favorable outside show.'

'Thy words promise well. Lead the way.'

Nunez now ordered his men to wheel into platoons; in another moment they were galloping at an easy pace along the winding ascent to the mountain, and having reached a mule path which led to the right through the

thick forest, they halted. Here Garcilazo gave a shrill whistle with a silver tube attached to a riding whip, which in a few moments was answered faintly in the distance. At length the heavy tramp of horses was distinctly heard, and a company of banditti, numbering four score, emerged one by one from the wood, and arranged themselves in the road above at the distance of a hundred rods.

Garcilazo and De Vega spurred their horses up the ascent, where the bandits had assembled, and after a brief consultation with their chief, they wheeled their horses, and, followed by the whole company, rode slowly towards the cavaliers of Nunez, who received them with a courteous salute. As Garcilazo had intimated they did not contrast very favorably with the well accoutered cavaliers before them. Don Manuel's men were oddly if not fantastically apparelled. There were no dresses in the corps that bore any resemblance, either as to fashion or fabric, one with another. It seemed as if each man had attired himself to suit his own convenience or taste; and to give an adequate idea of the whole would require a minute and separate description of each bandit. Generally, their dresses were exceedingly gaudy, and a collection of the whole might have formed an extensive and magnificent theatrical wardrobe. One sported the costume of a Spanish cavalier; another appeared as a Mexican general; a third as an *arriero*; a fourth as a Brigand of the Appenines; a fifth as a Camanche chief; a sixth as a Russian cossack; a seventh as a French cuirassier; and indeed, all might be distinguished by some fashion of dress peculiar to nearly every nation on the globe. They were as motley a looking crew as ever passed in review—the 'Ancient and Honorable Artillery,' the army of Bombastes, or the ragged regiment of Falstaff to the contrary notwithstanding.

Before the banditti arrived, Nunez divested himself of his disguise, and was now mounted upon a noble looking and high-mettled charger, of a cream-color, contrasting oddly with the insignificant beast from which he had just dismounted. The cavalier leader wore the uniform of his corps, with the addition of silver epaulettes, and a helmet cap with ostrich plumes. He was dignified, noble and commanding in appearance, although scarcely twenty-three years of age. His hair was black as the raven's, but fine and glossy, and it curled luxuriantly from beneath his cap and even rested upon his shoulders. His eyes were dark and large and quick-sighted as the antelope's, yet the expression of his face was mild, ingenuous and magnanimous. His sun-browned cheeks told of exposure to the torrid sun, while a scar upon his prominent forehead indicated that he had passed through scenes of danger.

Manrique was a tall, powerfully-framed man, some five years older than his cousin, with small black penetrating eyes, shaggy eyebrows, compressed lips, and long straight hair. His countenance wore a sinister expression, although it indicated resolution and courage. His dress was purely that of a Brigand—black velvet embroidered chaqueta, yellow satin waistcoat spangled with silver; silk breeches, fastened at the knee with rib-

bons ; and on his ruffled shirt bosom was displayed a diamond brooch, while his fingers sparkled with jewelled rings of great value. His brigand hat was also enriched with a cluster of precious stones, forming the socket of a single eagle's feather, which towered gracefully above his head. A wide black leather belt encompassed his waist, fastened in front by a huge silver buckle, from which hung a rapier and a gold-mounted stiletto. As he approached Alvarado Nunez he assumed a complacent look, and a forced smile lingered upon his inauspicious features.

'*Buen venido !* Welcome ! cousin Nunez,' said Manrique as he halted.

'*Muchas gracias !* many thanks !' replied Nunez.

'You have fared well, my gallant cousin ; your ranks are full ; your men well armed and well equipped. The account of your success in Gautemala has already reached us,' said the bandit chief as he glanced his eye along the column of cavaliers.

'That we have rendered some assistance to the patriot Carrera, I do not doubt. Would that we might do something towards freeing our own unhappy country from a despot's sway. But how's this, Manrique ? Your followers look as if they had been collected from the four quarters of the globe !' said Nunez, slightly ironical.

'You are aware that we style ourselves the Independent Rovers, and every man accouters himself in accordance with his taste and independence. Yet we live in great harmony, and the time with us passes away as merrily and as happily as mortals can desire. Come, you shall partake of our hospitality. Let us forget past feuds, and strive to be friends. Our rendezvous lies but half a league from this, and the sun will have disappeared ere you can find comfortable shelter for yourself and comrades.'

'True !' replied Nunez, hesitating. 'But ——'

'Nay, nay, cousin, make no objections. You must consent to be our guests for to-night, at least ; besides I have important information for your ear that may yet serve thee well.'

'Well, well, Manrique, I accept your hospitable offer. Lead the way, we will accompany you.'

In a few moments both companies of cavaliers were in motion, the two chiefs riding side by side in the centre of the column. They entered the forest, pursuing a labyrinthine course, almost bewildering to the followers of Nunez.

## CHAPTER II.

SCENERY OF MEXICO. GORGEOUS CAVE OF THE BRIGANDS. THE BANQUET. WEALTH OF THE BRIGAND CHIEF. THE TIARA OF DIAMONDS. THE TOAST. INDIGNATION OF NUNEZ.

The day was far advanced, and the lofty snow-crowned peak of Orizava reflected the last rays of the setting sun, as the two companies of outlawed cavaliers reached an open square, nearly level, surrounded by a dense growth of trees, at an elevation of upwards of two thousand feet from the ravine, the scene of our first incident. It was a lovely evening, and from this lofty eminence could be viewed a scene of grandeur and magnificence—the valley of Mexico—with its plains, its lakes, its forests, and cities of architectural beauty—embosomed within dark huge mountains rising up at every view. Far in the distance were to be seen the snow-capped volcanic peaks and intervening isolated cones gleaming in the blue sky, making the vast extended landscape sublime and grand if not picturesquely beautiful. Upon this commanding height the two bands of outlaws dismounted, and at a signal a number of Indian grooms appeared, who led the horses to a cavern, fitted up into a convenient stable, contiguous to the plain. The men were now ordered into a line, after which they filed singly through a clump of thick bushes, seemingly the most impenetrable place bordering the square. After proceeding some twenty rods, they halted before a stupendous mound of granite, covered with moss and small shrubs, extending from base to summit upwards of eighty feet. A rugged and narrow aperture was visible in the mound, into which the bandit leader entered, followed by the whole corps, and as the last file disappeared a huge slab of rough stone moved diagonally from the top of the entrance, leaving the front, to all appearances as Nature had first formed it. The hall through which the outlaws first passed was narrow, and more rugged than the exterior of this cavernous mound, but as they proceeded onward it widened, when their progress was for a moment stayed, until a massive pair of iron doors could be unbolted, unbarred and thrown back upon their ponderous hinges.—After descending a short flight of hewn stone steps the company stood in the armory of Don Manuel. This apartment was nearly forty feet in length, by twenty in breadth, and its height fifteen feet. From its rough granite sides were suspended carbines, pistols, sabres, mahajas, and horse equipage arranged in tolerable order. Here the cavaliers deposited their



arms and exchanged their uniforms for undress suits, and here all discipline was ended. Many recognitions now took place between the corps of Nuñez and Manrique, for most of whom had either served together in the army of Bustamente or as outlaws under Nuñez, and cordial greetings were extended to the guests and met with happy responses. Officers and subordinates were now on an equality, and all seemed disposed to pass the evening merrily and happily.

An hour passed when the cavaliers were summoned to the banquet.— Suddenly a double door flew open, and a blaze of light burst unexpectedly upon the visitors from an adjoining hall into which the company were ushered. This was the banqueting hall of the cavern, and exceeded by far the dimensions of the armory, and was furnished with all the richness and gorgeousness of an Eastern Prince's seraglio. Upon the floor was spread a beautifully colored Brussels carpet of the finest texture. The ceiling was high and arched, and from it hung four large glass chandeliers, brilliantly illuminated, reflecting with dazzling splendor the innumerable particles of glittering quartz and feldspar, like diamonds, studding irregularly the calcareous arch, and making resplendent the many transparent stalactites which sparkled in clusters from the high vaulted roof. The walls presented a similar brilliancy, but unlike the bright gemmed canopy above the work of art and design were manifest. In the centre of this gorgeous room two tables, loaded with delicious edibles, and surrounded by soft-cushioned chairs, occupied nearly half of the apartment, and presented to the eyes of the hungry cavaliers a most gratifying spectacle. Plate of silver and gold of immense value furnished the table, but the want of uniformity in the patterns, indicated that it must have been collected from a great variety of sources. Standing equi-distant around the tables were black servants, dressed in white, and for neatness and efficiency would have honored any hotel on the continent. At a signal from Don Manuel the company seated themselves at the luxurious banquet, placing himself at a small table slightly elevated, but connecting the two others, with Colonel Nunez beside him at his right hand.

Mirth and joy reigned supreme among the entertainers and guests at this festive board; and as the toast went round, and the song was sung, and the rich goblets of delicious wine were quaffed, peals of boisterous merriments reverberated along the walls of this subterraneous palace; and among the whole company there was but one who did not feel all those happy sensations inspired by the jolly god. This was Alvorade Nunez, and it was with difficulty that he could force a look of complacency into his noble countenance at the pleasant sallies of his chief entertainer. His whole manner, although unnoticed by Manrique, betrayed symptoms of displeasure and uneasiness. He saw before him the undoubted fruits of crime and even bloodshed, and a band of men too far steeped in guilt ever to reform. The light-heartedness and gaiety of such men struck him with astonishment; and he wondered that their countenances did not wear the murderer's



demoniac smile rather than the apparent smile of conscious innocence, and like the hyæna and wolf ever present a ferocious aspect.

‘By San Iago, cousin Nunez!’ said Manrique, ‘thou hast drunk no wine; thy goblet is still filled well nigh to the brim. We would have a toast from thee.’

‘I have tasted, and the wine is well-flavored. Fill up and you shall hear a sentiment,’ replied Alvorado, rising. ‘Long life and happiness to the patriotic Bustamente, and confusion and death to the despotic usurper, Santa Anna!’

The toast was received with shouts from the cavaliers of Nunez, and with equal applause from most of the banditti, but there were symptoms of displeasure manifest in the visages of Garcilazo and De Vega, who as lieutenants under Manrique, occupied the lower ends of the tables.

‘No, Señor!’ said Garcilazo, rising. ‘I protest—’

‘Silence!’ commanded Don Manuel, in a thundering tone.

Garcilazo doggedly resumed his seat, while his rough features displayed a malevolent smile.

‘My lieutenant has imbibed too freely,’ said Manrique, in a low voice, by way of apology, though he, himself, felt that he could have protested with his whole heart against the sentiment of our hero. ‘Cheer up, good cousin, I trust that our fare pleaseth thy palate.’

‘Excellent! delicious! believe me,’ replied Nunez. ‘How is it, Manrique, that thou canst entertain thy friends so luxuriously and magnificently? I doubt not that if thou hadst maintained thy high rank in the government, the splendor of thy household would have been far less than the magnificence I now behold.’

‘By San Francis thou speakest truly—fortune has lavishly showered her gifts around me. I would not exchange my wealth for that of the richest grandee in all Mexico!’

‘How you have become thus wealthy is to me an enigma,’ remarked Nunez, ‘unless, perchance, another Orcorbrand has enlisted in thy service.—But how is it, Manrique,’ continued he, with a satirical smile playing upon his lips, ‘that you display such singular taste in the selection of your plate? I perceive no two sets that bear the slightest resemblance to each other.’

‘Come, come, thou shouldst not criticise the taste of a free rover of the Black Forest; one, too, who cannot well purchase his wares at the fashionable bazaars of the capital. Be assured that the richest we could procure is before thee; besides it was collected from a variety of sources, and one must not be too particular where there is apt to be but a small stock to select from.’

‘It is, indeed, surpassingly rich; I but alluded to the lack of similarity.’

‘Ay, ay; then I suppose that thy tables are furnished with a service of plate as uniformly as the accoutrements of thy handsome cavaliers. Is it not thus?’

'My tables! my plate!' reiterated Nunez, laughing. 'I am not, to my knowledge, the owner or possessor of a single piece of silver plate.'

'Santa Madre! What! you do not mean to say that it is all of pure gold?' ejaculated Manrique.

'Neither silver nor gold, brass or copper.'

'Si, I understand. Thy wealth hath a more portable form?' said Manrique, enquiringly. 'Diamonds, rubies and pearls, I presume?

'No, Manrique, all the wealth that I possess, aside from my weapons and equipments, would not purchase three days' rations for my followers.'

'You deserve better luck, good cousin—thou shouldst have remained in Mexico rather than have attached thyself to the ragged army of Carrera.—Seldom passes the day when my heroic followers do not add something to my wealth. Look at these beautifully wrought gold goblets—these were taken, together with a valuable casket of diamonds, from a Spanish grandee, who passed over the mountain yesterday; and although he had a score of men for an escort, they laid down their arms without a shot being fired, leaving us to possess ourselves of the old gentleman's valuables without opposition.'

'Cowardly villains!' said Don Alvarado.

Manrique started up with an angry look that darkened his bold features.

'Pardon, Senor!' said Nunez, I meant not the assailants.'

'True—cousin—true,' quickly responded Manrique, yet with a look of displeasure, for well he knew the cause of meeting with no opposition from the escort. 'Speaking of my successes,' continued he; 'we surprised on the same day a caravan, bound to the city of Mexico from California, from which we took money and pearls, valued at seventy *talegas*\*; and also this tiara of superb diamonds, probably worth half as much more.' Manrique took from his bosom a casket containing this treasure and shewed it to his astonished guest, who examined it minutely, and on the back of the setting discovered the initials I. C. in exceedingly small letters. Without remarking this discovery he returned the precious jewel to his host.

'The diamonds are indeed valuable; your success has been very great,' said Nunez.

'Great, truly, and thou shalt be equally successful, if thou hast become less scrupulous, and wilt give heed to my advice.'

'I cannot compromise my sense of honor and common honesty for the wealth of the republic,' replied Nunez.

'Common honesty! Santa Maria! I thank thee cousin for that term.—Common honesty, forsooth! That quality is not indigenous to the soil of Mexico. We are called outlaws, brigands, highway robbers! and does not the government functionaries, by example, encourage us? Do not they murder, rob, pillage and destroy even their own subjects? We must do as they in self defence! The term honesty is obsolete in this country! The

\*seventy thousand dollars.

great mass are robbers from the government officers to the wretched soldiery, and from the Padres of the Church to the leperos of the capital! Come, Nunez, join with us; thou shalt still be leader of thy band, and I will command mine. Our prizes shall be divided equally. Such a company of men as thine should ere this have filled thy coffers with gold.'

'I cannot accept thy terms,' answered Nunez. 'I have nobler objects in view.'

'Sayest thou so? Can Alvorado Nunez, the proscribed bandit chief—the outlaw—find better or nobler employment in Mexico than that which the mountain passes afford?'

'Yes, Manrique, Nunez has nobler employment. He seeks but to emancipate his native country from the iron despotism and dark superstition and bigotry that now enslave it; to un rivet the chains which bind the people to the dust; and although he is now termed an outlaw and a highway robber, he never sanctioned the demanding of money or life from any person, save from those who had in their charge government treasures. These I regarded as but fair subjects for plunder. The minions of power robbed me of my fair fame, of my commission, and of my wealth; and at this very hour a price is fixed upon my head sufficiently large to tempt the duplicity and treachery of half my followers, did they not stand in fear of my vengeance, which they know full well would at no distant day surely overtake them.'

'Come, come, coz, let's postpone this subject for a more fitting occasion,' said Manrique, as he filled Alvorado's goblet with wine. 'Let us drink and be merry. Garcilazo,' cried he, 'we would hear a song from thee.'

'I cannot sing to-night,' replied the lieutenant, 'but in honor of thee, Senor Capitan, I will offer a toast as a substitute. Fill your goblets, gentlemen—to the brim—and let every drop be drained! "The black-eyed beauty of Mexico—Doña Isabella de Cascara! A joyous day will be that to us when she shall be hailed as the Señora Manrique!"'

Garcilazo's toast was received with loud acclamations from the bandits, and drew a response from Manrique, in which he thanked his lieutenant, and eulogized the matchless charms of the Senorita.

But far different were the feelings and actions of Alvorado Nunez. He had raised the goblet to his lips and was about to quaff the sparkling beverage, when the name of one—most dear to him—was spoken in a bandits' cave, and by profane lips. The blood forsook his cheek—his eyes flashed with anger—his lips quivered and his arm trembled—and the goblet of wine was replaced before him untouched. Fiercely did he look contrasted with the joyous faces about him! More than once he sought the hilt of his stiletto! He would have struck it to the heart of his guest!—but there was a moral inward feeling prompting him to withhold! He had never taken life save in the cause of the just on the field of battle! And to become in one moment an assassin—a murderer—was to become a being whom he should himself ever despise!

'How now, cousin Nunez—you look ill?' said Manrique as he noticed the disturbed manner of his guest.

'Si, si—slightly—a sudden indisposition—I beg to retire,' replied Nunez.

Manrique ordered his surgeon and two of his servants to attend him to the sleeping apartment prepared for him. This order was promptly obeyed, and Nunez found himself in a luxuriously furnished room, such as he had not occupied since he fled from the capital. Having recovered from the sudden confusion which had so excited him, he dismissed the surgeon and attendants, and sought to quell his agitated mind through sleep.

Meanwhile the bandits continued their carousal and made the caverns resound with their boisterous revelry. It was at a late hour ere they ceased their clamorous jollity. At length all was silent save the sound of heavy breathing from the drunken sleepers, and the tread of the sentinels who guarded each door within the cavern as well as the rocky barrier without.

## CHAPTER III.

OUR HERO'S REFLECTIONS. MORNING WALK OF THE RIVAL CHIEFTAINS. A MAGNIFICENT SCENE. A CARAVAN DESCRIBED. INFAMOUS PROPOSITION. THE BRIGANDS PREPARE FOR PLUNDERING THE CARAVAN.— APPARENT INACTIVITY OF THE CAVALIERS OF NUNEZ. THE COUNTER-MOVEMENT. TREACHERY OF THE ESCORT. DREADFUL SLAUGHTER. THE ATTACK OF THE BRIGANDS. THEIR DEFEAT BY THE UNKNOWN HORSEMEN.

The cavalier, Alvarado Nunez, after a vain endeavor to seek the repose which exhausted nature requires, arose from his couch of downy softness, and paced to and fro the apartment with a troubled mind and a heart agitated with conflicting emotions. He almost meditated revenge, but to commit crime would make him unworthy of the love of Isabella de Cascara, and his better nature prevailed. Still he had learned enough to fill his soul with hatred for his cousin. She had been made the object of merriment in a bandits' revel; and he doubted not that the bandit chief really aspired to the hand of this noble lady, to whom he had himself pledged his love, and had received in return tokens which had convinced him that he was regarded with affection by her. Eighteen months had passed away since he had bidden her farewell, and in that farewell she expressed her grief in terms that could not be misinterpreted. Yet there was room for doubt.— Since that time what changes had taken place. Santa Anna, under the sacred name of liberty, had usurped executive power, and now exercised his supremacy with a tyrant's will; and with regret Nunez had beheld many of those who had at first strongly opposed him were now most strenuous in his support; and among the number General Hernandez de Cascara, the father of his beloved Isabella. Could she too have changed? This was indeed possible—for it now first flitted across his mind that his having been proclaimed a bandit might be a sufficient incitement for her to banish him from her heart. But he argued within himself how it was possible that Manrique should have become acquainted with her, since he had become the most noted bandit in all Mexico, and surely would not dare to risk his head within the gates of the capital. As if to add new torment to his mind, the thought that Manrique was leagued with the minions of Santa Anna, perhaps with the President himself, proved that visits to the capital, under these circumstances might have been made with impunity; and from cer-

tain intimations which he had gathered from Manrique added fresh proof to his first suspicions and now carried conviction to his mind.

‘Dare this treacherous bandit presume to aspire to the hand of Isabella de Cascara?’ soliloquised he, inaudibly. ‘Heaven forbid! that a being possessing the sweetness and virtue of an angel, should ever become the wife of a ruthless brigand! I also understand the true character of my fallen kinsman. I would have made an effort to rescue him from his degraded life—but he has sunk too low. I now fully comprehend the despicable means by which he has become the possessor of untold wealth, and he no doubt pays heavy tribute to his master at the capital. This matter I am resolved to probe to the bottom; but I must be circumspect and dissemble lest my motives be discovered.’

Nunez once more sought his couch, and ere long he fell into a profound slumber, from which in a few hours he was awakened by a loud knocking against the door of his apartment.

‘Who comes?’ demanded Nunez.

‘Amigo! Senor Manrique.’

Nunez unbolted the door and admitted his host, who pleasantly saluted him:

‘Excuse me, cousin, for disturbing thee thus early. The morning is fine, and the pure air of Orizava will invigorate thee. Come, let us walk forth ere the sun climbs above the intervening peaks.’

‘Many thanks, Manrique. I will join you presently,’ replied Nunez.

‘Meet me in the armory,’ said the bandit chief as he retired.

Nunez quickly attired himself, and placing a brace of pistols and a mahaja in his girdle, rejoined Manrique, and accompanied him through the palace cave into the bright and beautiful world without.

Unsurpassingly lovely was the morning, and the grandeur, beauty and sublimity of the wide spread mountainous landscape, were heightened by the purity of the atmosphere, the stillness of the scene, and the serene rays of the sun just rising in glorious majesty from his golden bed, and tipping with gilded beams the many peaks of eternal snow, towering upward as if intended by the Supreme Architect for conic pillars to sustain the heavenly arch; while around and below the vallies and lesser mountains smiled with varied shades of green, blending harmoniously with the clear blue atmosphere.

The two chieftains pursued their way leisurely through a winding path which led them to the crown of the mound, which formed a massive rocky roof for the bandits gorgeous rendezvous. This eminence commanded a finer and more extended view of the scenery than the square below, and drew from Alvorado expressions of wonder and delight as he gazed upon the vast picture before him.

‘Santa Maria! A most lovely morning!’ exclaimed Manrique.

‘I never beheld a lovelier!’ responded Nunez.

'Above all things,' resumed Manrique, 'I should like an adventure this morning, just by the way of whetting my appetite for breakfast.'

'This mountain abounds in game, I believe?' said Nunez, enquiringly.

'Oh yes!—such as the wild boar, goat and antelope—but I never hunt such game,' replied Manrique taking a telescope, which was slung to his back, and bringing it up to his eye, looking eastward. 'By the aid of this instrument I am enabled to view many leagues of the principal road leading from Vera Cruz. But I perceive nothing—look, perhaps your eyesight is keener than mine.'

Nunez took the glass and held it to his eye for a few moments. 'The road seems clear, and yet methinks that that cloud of dust rising above the tall trees which obscure the road proceeds from the movements of a caravan of *arrieros* or a company of horsemen. In a few moments they will have passed the woods into the plain.'

As Nunez had calculated, a caravan, though at the distance of three leagues, was seen to emerge slowly from the wood, and by the aid of the glass Don Manuel could discern a company of *arrieros*, with their beasts heavily burdened, and preceded by a small escort of cavaliers. In the rear of the escort, was a Mexican carriage, in which the bandit presumed rode the proprietor of the caravan.

'By San Iago, cousin!' said Manrique, I doubt not there is wealth enough on those mules backs to raise and equip a force of one thousand men. That is the kind of game I delight in capturing. We shall have rare sport!

'Surely, Manrique, 'you do not intend ——'

'Si, cousin,' interrupted the bandit. 'Ere two hours have passed yon caravan shall be in my power. Pardon me, Nunez, I should have offered thee the honor of engaging the caravan escort.' 'Come, you shall have the golden opportunity of making thyself rich.'

'But, Manrique, it may be a private caravan—some grandee travelling towards the capital.'

'So much the better, cousin! The government transports are exceedingly small, now-a-days—they are hardly worth plundering.'

'I positively decline the *honor* as you term it.'

'Seriously?'

'Seriously! and intreat of thee, if you really intend what your words intimate, to forbear!'

'By San Francis, you plead in vain. Preach no more of thy morality to me. Since thou wilt not let dame Fortune smile upon thee I must not disregard her favors.'

Thus saying they hurried down the path to the plain, where the brigands had assembled for the purpose of displaying their equestrian feats to their cavalier guests. Manrique gave orders to his lieutenant, Garcilazo, to select twenty-five men for the important expedition. The orders were promptly obeyed and the company of banditti, armed and equipped as on the evening previous, were prepared for duty. Manrique put himself at

the head of his corps, and after inviting Nunez and his cavaliers to accompany him a short distance where they might observe the attack, an invitation which he eagerly accepted, the banditti proceeded through the thick forest towards the barranca, followed soon after by Nunez and his company, who halted two hundred rods distant above the place where Manrique's force intended to lie in ambush. Nunez now despatched ten of his followers, headed by a trusty leader, to a point half a league beyond the ravine, and instructed them to proceed thither by a circuitous route in order that their movements might not be observed by any of the bandits, and there to await further orders.

Meanwhile the bandits are remaining inactive, awaiting the arrival of the caravan, we will notice the movements of a single horseman, attired as a mestizzo, who soon after followed the ten cavaliers of Nunez, though taking a wider circuit, and riding with greater speed. Onward he proceeded at the distance of nearly a league, when he emerged from the road directly in the rear of the escort, and riding up to the officer in command, requested permission to speak with the proprietor of the caravan on business of vital importance. The request was granted, and the horseman halted until the carriage came up, which he saw contained a middle-aged gentleman, with a fine expressive countenance, and a young lady whose features were closely veiled, and thus addressed the former:

‘Senor, I come to apprise you of danger—robbers lie in your path—return ere it be too late!’

‘Many thanks for the interest you manifest in my behalf, sir stranger,’ replied the gentleman. ‘But I have heard so many rumors of robbers, during our journey, and have proceeded so far unmolested, that I am in doubt as to there being any on the route.’

‘Believe me, Senor,’ said the horseman earnestly, ‘Not half a league from this, in a deep barranca, lies concealed a company of well armed and desperate brigands, who are apprised of your coming. Be assured if you proceed you will be attacked.’

‘I cannot now return,’ replied the gentleman, ‘but must pass the Orizava mountain ere nightfall. Why should I fear a band of robbers? I have an efficient escort!’

‘*Por el amor de Dios!*’ exclaimed the horseman, ‘return, or lose your wealth, and endanger your life and that of the young lady with you. Trust not to your half score of troops—the brigands outnumber them two to one; besides, government troops have been known to be treacherous!’

‘I thank you for your advice, sir stranger, but cannot follow it!’

‘Father,’ said a sweet-toned voice from beneath the veil, which vibrated pleasingly upon the ear of the stranger, ‘This caballero’s words sound as if there were real danger in our path. Give heed to his advice—let us return or halt until we can despatch a courier for an additional escort.’

‘No, my child! I am resolved to proceed on! I should be hailed as a coward ever after should I return.’



'God preserve you, Senor!' said the caballero, as he spurred his horse into the dark forest.

The caravan proceeded slowly on as before. The escort were ordered to prepare for an attack, which they did as well as a few old rusty carbines with mahajas to match would permit.

'Father,' said the young lady who unveiled her features soon as the horseman departed, presenting a face of exceeding sweetness and beauty; 'knowest thou the caballero who expresses so much solicitude in our behalf? he wears the garb of a mestizzo, but methinks his noble bearing and courteous speech proclaim him of higher rank.'

'He is unknown to me, my child; and I agree with thee in opinion that he is not what he seemeth. Perchance he is himself a brigand! Had his address comported better with his costume I might have given more heed to his information.'

'Nay, nay, father, he was too sincere for us to entertain suspicion of his intention. I cannot doubt that he spake truth, and I must confess I have a presentiment of danger.'

'Maintain thy courage, daughter. The Brigands will not dare molest us and hazard an engagement with our escort.'

'But I fear, as the caballero intimated, they may prove treacherous. Such has often been the case.'

'True, my child! I grieve that our soldiery are not under more severe restrictions; but lessen thy fears, they will not dare show treachery to an officer of the state.'

'This then may be our only hope,' replied the grandee's daughter.

The caravan had now passed the plain, and entered the thick woods. Near by were concealed the ten cavaliers whom Nunez had despatched from his corps; farther on lie in ambush the bandits of Don Manuel; and at a point still farther on, overlooking a portion of the barranca, stood the principal body of the cavaliers of Nunez; while the single strange horseman had joined the ten cavaliers, all of whom were now appareled and equipped as mestizoes.

The cavalry, composing the escort, were allowed to pass the point where the robbers were hidden, in order first to attack the muleteers and drive their beasts with their precious burdens into the forest, and thus make sure of the booty. The bandits, headed by their chief, now spurred their steeds into the road, and by an adroit manœuvre completely cut off the escort from the carriage and muleteers. The cavalry now faced about and were about to charge upon the bandits, when Don Manuel suddenly displayed a small red flag, with the words, '*Viva el Libertador!*' inscribed upon it. This being perceived by the captain of the escort, he ordered his men again to face about, when they left the caravan and at a quick pace proceeded on towards the ascent to the mountain. This treacherous movement was noticed by the strange horsemen who was now standing where he could overlook the scenes in the ravine.

“*Obiedos de Dios!*” exclaimed he to the ten cavaliers. “Vile traitorous cowards! They shall meet with their just reward! Here, Enrique,” said he to a youth beside him. “Take this clarion—ride quickly through the forest until you pass the barranca. Give the signal of attack and as speedily return!”

The gallant youth spurred his steed and quickly disappeared. Soon the sound of the clarion echoed through the forest! The cavaliers of Nunez, who were prepared for any emergency that might occur, suddenly blocked up the road, and arrested the flight of the escort! A desperate and bloody conflict ensued—and ere ten minutes had elapsed, the traitorous soldiers of the government, without a single exception, lie weltering in purple gore!

We will now return to the carávan. The banditti had commenced their work of plunder—the arrieros, terrified and dismayed, fled and secreted themselves in the forests, leaving their mules in possession of the banditti. Manrique, followed by Garcilazo and De Vega, now rode up to the carriage, and demanded the jewels and other valuables in possession of its occupants.

“*Santa Madre de Dios!* protect us!” exclaimed the young lady trembling with affright, as the bandits appeared.

“One of the villains at least shall die!” said the grandee, as he discharged one of his pistols at the robbers. De Vega fell from his horse mortally wounded.

“Jesus! Maria! thou shalt be fearfully avenged!” ejaculated Manrique, as he saw his lieutenant fall.

At this moment half a dozen other bandits rode up, when one of them fell from the second pistol shot of the grandee.

“Jesus! que Démonio! Seize the hoary-headed villain and drag him forth! He must die! Spare the life of the *muchacha*, and bear her to the cave!” ordered Don Manuel.

Four of the bandits grasped the grandee and in a brutal manner drew him forth from the carriage, while Garcilazo, from the opposite side lifted out the fainting maiden and bore her towards Manrique. The latter while in the act of raising her to the saddle beside him, was struck down by a powerful blow from a horseman who suddenly darted into the road. Ere the bandits could revenge their fallen chief, ten other horsemen appeared, and a desperate combat ensued. The robbers dismayed by the loss of their leader, and the unexpected assault, soon were forced to fly, leaving the field and booty in possession of the ten cavaliers and the brave stranger, whom we left at the beginning of the assault concealed in the forest near the road. The frightened muleteers now came forth and assisted in again getting the mules in motion with their heads turned toward the place from whence they had that morning set out. The grandee and his daughter were assisted into the carriage, and the whole carávan, with the ten cavaliers and the strange horseman acting as escort, soon arrived at the *hacienda* of Don Antonio Floresco at the distance of two leagues from the barranca. The lady, who had now recovered from the effects of her affright, was handed

from the carriage by her strange protector, while the grandee was assisted out by the cavaliers.

'Brave caballeros!' said the old gentleman, 'you have done us infinite service, and we owe thee more than our eternal gratitude; and by San Lorenzo thou shalt have gold!'

'No, Senor, we cannot accept thy gold,' replied the brave stranger. 'We are amply compensated by the satisfaction we have received in defeating the merciless villains.'

'Si, si,' responded the ten cavaliers.

'You will at least allow me to place upon your finger this token of our thankfulness,' said the young lady advancing towards the stranger, and placing upon his finger a diamond of great brilliancy. 'Wear it ever for the sake of the person whose life you have saved.'

'Allow me to behold thy features, fair lady,' replied he, 'that I may know how to prize this sparkling gem.'

'No, caballero; seek not to know me,' said the lady.

There was something mysterious and yet fascinating in the manner of the veiled daughter of the grandee, that operated like a charm upon the mind of him who had rescued her from out the robbers' hands. The tones of her voice fell upon his ear like sweetest music; her every movement possessed an enchanting grace which quite captivated him; and after the farewell had been spoken, and his steed was bearing him from her presence, his eye lingered upon her until she finally disappeared!

## CHAPTER IV.

## SINGULAR INTERVIEW OF THE RIVAL CHIEFTAINS. DEPARTURE FOR THE CAPITAL. A SLIGHT DETENTION.

The sun had reached its meridian ere the Brigands, with their fallen leader, had reached their rendezvous. Don Manrique, whom we left senseless in the barranca, soon after revived, and was borne to the cave on a rude litter which his comrades had constructed of green boughs cut from the forest trees. He was not dangerously wounded though weak from the loss of blood. The force of Alvorado Nunez arrived in one hour afterwards without the loss of a man, notwithstanding the severity of their engagement with the caravan escort. Nunez forthwith sought an interview with Don Manuel, and found him reclining upon a luxurious couch smoking a cigarito.

'Ah! Manrique!' exclaimed Alvorado. 'I thought you were slain. I saw you fall!'

'By San Francis! it was a narrow escape, cousin. A half score of men, dressed like mestizzoes fell upon us, and dealt heavy blows about our heads! else the caravan treasures would have now been in our possession!'

'A lucky incident for the caravan!' remarked Nunez.

'You speak truly!' returned Manrique. 'I would give the richest diamond in my collection to know by whom we were so severely dealt with!'

'Your force fared much better than the escort?'

'By San Iago! I believe not one among them is left to the tale!' replied Manrique, in a disturbed manner. 'I liked not your interference, after you had refused to attack the caravan.'

'I war not with peaceful travellers!' said Nunez in a dignified manner 'but with the minions of the despot! I beheld their treachery and saw the pusillanimous villains fly! They were my enemies and I cut them down!'

'Well, well! *dejarlo!*—let it pass!—We must henceforth be friends, Alvorado. Hast thou considered our proposition of last night?'

'It required no consideration,' replied Nunez. 'I rejected the proposal at once. I can never consent to become more vile than I am!'

'Remember! our cause is lost—irrecoverably lost!'

'No, Manrique! I am assured that the despot's power is daily weakening, and that ere long his sway must cease!'

'*Mentira!*—It is not true!—I was in the city of Mexico but five days ago. I there learned that Bustamente's generals had made peace with the President! Moreover, the air was ringing with shouts of "Buen suceso, Santa Anna! Viva Santa Anna!"'

'Santa Maria! You surprise me!' replied Nunez. 'What! Señor Manrique—the Brigand Chieftain—the terror of the valley of Mexico, visit the capital? Come, come, this is a jest!'

'Truth, by San Francis! I have friends there! I go and return at pleasure—but always in disguise! And so mayst thou, cousin, if thou wilt but heed my advice. A chieftain who commands four score caballeros, like unto thine or mine, is held in no despicable estimation in these troublous times!'

'It cannot be possible that Don Manuel has——' Nunez checked his utterance of the severe thought that dwelt upon his mind. 'I can hardly give credit to thy statement, he continued. 'I should not dare risk my head within a league of the despot's citadel! Besides, I have nothing to entice me thither. My friends are banished and their estates confiscated, and until another revolution reinstates them in their former position I shall roam with my gallant cavaliers over the mountains and forests of Guatemala and Mexico!'

'Then be assured thou wilt never visit thy native city again!' replied Manrique. 'The President is acquiring popularity and power daily. Canst thou not think of some fair-cheeked, black-eyed Senorita, that occupies a share of your heart sufficiently large to attract thee thither.'

'My head would surely have to answer for such bold rashness!'

'Nay, nay, I will lead thee there in safety; and I swear to thee thou shalt depart unmolested; moreover, I will seek an opportunity to introduce thee to my affianced!'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Nunez, a gleam of apprehension darting from his expressive eye; 'and who is this favored fair one?'

'One whose wealth and loveliness surpasseth all the maidens of the capital. She is the *hija* of a grandee, and her name is in the mouths of all the caballeros and lechuginos of Mexico!'

The hand of Nunez instinctively sought the handle of his double-edged mahaja, though unnoticed by the bandit chief.

'I am yet in the dark, Manrique,' said he. 'I would know her name!'

'Señorita de Cascara!—*la hermosa, la sin par*—the beautiful, the peerless.'

The suspicions of Nunez in regard to Doña Isabella were now fully confirmed; and it was with difficulty that he suppressed the rage which boiled

within him. His first impulse was to annihilate his detested rival upon the spot! but the time for vengeance had not yet come! He was now convinced that Manrique was also leagued with those high in authority—perhaps, thought he, with Santa Anna himself—and he resolved in his heart to hazard all, and even life, in a full investigation of the matter.

‘Methinks Dona Isabella entertains great love for the romantic in consenting to become a Brigand’s wife, and to exchange her father’s palace for a robber’s cave!’

‘You do her injustice,’ replied the bandit. ‘She knows Manrique only as a Spanish grandee! When she becomes mine, she will reside in a Mexican palace with her loving lord, thy humble servant!’

‘You speak in riddles!’ remarked Nunez.

‘Nay, nay, cousin! Thou art dull of comprehension. I perceive you do not understand me. I will speak more plainly. Know then, that in consideration of the utter hopelessness of our cause, and rather than be a bandit all my days, I have made peace with Santa Anna, who is now my friend and my intercessor with the lady Isabella! Know, further, that I am commissioned by him to make overtures to thee! Attach thyself and thy brave followers to his cause, and thy courage and talents wilt soon place thee high in his esteem, and honor and wealth will be conferred upon thee. What says my cousin?’

‘Turn traitor, meanest thou?’

‘Si, if thou canst give it no gentler name. It is now the only course left—our cause, I repeat, is inevitably lost!’

‘Supposing that I consent to listen to the terms, how shall I proceed?’

‘Visit the President at the capital. I will accompany thee, and I warrant thou wilt receive friendly treatment.’

‘What assurance can I have for my safety, if I go to Mexico, and thrust my head into the tyrant’s den?’

‘Speak what thou requirest, and by St. Iago, if within my power it shall be granted thee?’

‘A generous offer,’ replied Nunez, hesitating.

‘Be not modest, cousin; by my faith, say what thou wilt, and thy terms shall be acceded to.’

‘Put into my possession this mountain castle, and your cavaliers under my officers, until my safe return, and I will proceed to Mexico with thee forthwith’

‘By San Lorenzo, thou’rt not so modest as I could have wished!’ said Manrique.

‘True; but I would not have my head exposed in *Plazuela de la Cebada*, for all that the blessed sun shines upon!’

‘Well, well, I accept thy terms. Tarry with us to-morrow, and on the next day I shall be prepared to depart!’

Don Maurique now complaining of weakness, Alvorado retired to his

apartment, where he contemplated the strange events that had transpired during his sojourn with the Brigands of the Black Forest. He resolved to proceed to Mexico, under the conditions named, knowing that the possession of this strong-hold of the mountain was a sufficient guarantee for the safety of his person; and he doubted not that the perfidious confessions of the bandit chief were wholly true, for his own observations had fully substantiated them.

He now ordered his first lieutenant, Enrique Canazilla, a noble and handsome youth, scarcely twenty-one years of age, to his presence. To him was communicated, in whispers, the startling information he had acquired; and during a long interview, their future course of action was marked out. Enriquez was invested with the command of the force, until his superior officer should return from the capital; and every precaution was taken to guard against treachery and every other possible emergency.

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On the morning appointed for the departure of the Rival Chiefs for the City of Mexico, the two companies of cavaliers were paraded on the plain contiguous to the cavern. Their commanders came forth fully equipped, and mounted upon high-mettled chargers. Manrique now addressed his men, explaining his motives for surrendering temporarily his command, and instructed his men to obey the orders of Enrique Canazilla, whom his guest had honored with this commission.

The chiefs resolved to travel without escort, and after returning to the cave, where they disguised themselves, they set out for the capital, taking with them one attendant each. During the first day of their journeying no incident occurred worthy of note. On the second day they encountered a body of government cavaliers; the leader of whom commanded our travellers to halt.

‘*Quen vive ?*’

‘*Gentes de paz ?*’ replied Manrique.

‘*Que Gentes ?*’

‘*Amigos !* bound to the capital.’

‘Your passport!’ demanded the leader fiercely, at the same moment cocking his pistol.

At this peremptory summons Manrique pulled off his gauntlet, and displayed his little finger to the view of the officer, on which was encircled a signet ring. This movement caused the officer to replace his pistol in the holsters of the saddle, and raise his hand respectfully to his cap.

‘Pass!’ said he.

Manrique answered the salutation of the officer and the parties separated.

‘We have had a narrow escape!’ said Alvorado Nunez, soon as they had

passed the troop. 'By what talisman, Manrique, were we prevented from immediate arrest?' said the captain.

'By one that may again serve thee, and of which thou shalt hereafter know more of,' replied Manrique.

'That was a detachment from Santa Anna's body guard?' said the captain.

'Si, Senor.'

'You seem possessed of privileges unusually allowed those who bear the stigma of outlaw and brigand?'

'Si, coz—I'm a favored one! By San Iago, thou shalt be so too!'

The travellers continued moderately on their way towards the great capital, meanwhile conversing on matters relative to the government, from which Nunez gathered much, developing the mystery which seemed to guide the course of Manrique.



## CHAPTER V.

THE CAPITAL. THE PROCESSION. GENEROUS CONDUCT OF OUR HEROINE. THE PLAZUELA DE LA CEBADOS. THE YANKEE AND THE HOLY PADRE. ZEB SHORT VICTORIOUS.

To Mexico—magnificent Mexico—the City of Palaces, as it may be correctly designated—we now convey our readers in advance of the cavaliers whom we left journeying in our last chapter. Let us seek a commanding eminence—the tower of the gigantic cathedral in the *Plaza Major*—where we can overlook the gorgeous magnificence that has arisen in place of the clay ruins of Tenochtitlan.

To the eye of the stranger, all appears wonderful and splendid and colossal. Behold the numberless churches, convents, and government edifices, with their white roofs glistening in the sunbeams, rising up in every direction: the broad and evenly-paved streets extending the whole length and breadth of the city, displaying an almost unbroken line of palaces, public buildings, and elegant mansions, erected in a style of architecture, which for graceful proportions and splendor of embellishments, might even challenge the Old World to point to an existing parallel. Mark, too, the grandeur and solidity of its details. Almost every building is constructed of porphyry, or porous amygdaloid, with walls of extraordinary thickness, and foundations which nothing but a mighty convulsion of nature can shake.—The facades are principally painted white, blue, crimson, green or red, and ornamented with designs, elaborately if not artistically sculptured; while many are overlaid with stained porcelain tiles of exceeding richness. In the central part of the city, such is the multiplicity of churches, monasteries, and public edifices, rising above the general outline, that it is with difficulty all can be designated; presenting, combined, a mass of colossal domes and gilded spires towering in splendid relief against the bright blue sky, unsurpassed in any city of the orient.

The interiors of the public edifices of Mexico, if possible, are more strik-

ingly rich in appearance than their exteriors; embellished as they are with paintings, statuary, gildings and other features of display most lavishly bestowed. The churches in particular present a tinselled and gaudy show; and in any other land where Catholicism prevails the good sense of its adherents would even blush for the depraved taste of the *padres* of the church of Mexico; but how great would be their envy to behold the enormous value of the gold and silver vases, shrines, and other consecrated vessels entrusted to their keeping.

Such is a bird's-eye view of the architecture and general appearance of the city of Montezuma, and without further digression we will proceed with our tale.

Contiguous to the Plaza Major, on the street *Espiritu Santo*, stands the magnificent palace of General Cascara, the wealthiest grandee of the capital, with its stained windows, carved balustrades and ornamented balconies, and surrounded by a spacious and luxuriant garden, containing an endless variety of the choicest shrubs and plants of Mexico, and rarest exotics from almost every other clime. The front balcony commands a view of the broad and palace-bordered street and the Great Square, and on all public occasions it usually presents an assemblage of the beauty and fashion of the metropolis.

It was Holy-day week in Mexico, a period when the city is thronged with a multitude from the vallies and mountains for leagues around. The Great Square, on Holy-Thursday, ere the sun had illumined the gilt-cross of the cathedral, swarmed with myriads of human beings, of all grades and conditions. Trafficking, sporting, gambling and quarrelling occupied the attention of the greater number, while the remainder stood lazily by watching the scene, and occasionally casting an impatient look through the street *Espiritu Santo*. As the day advanced the multitude thickened, and the hubtub and confusion momentarily increased. At length from the farther end of the street alluded to, a procession was descried approaching the square, and clamorous shouts followed the announcement. The various occupations were suddenly discontinued, and all eyes were turned towards the moving spectacle, which had a moment before issued from the court of the *Acordada*, or principal prison of Mexico, on its way to *Plazuela de la Cebada*, the place of execution. Slowly the procession moved up the street and through the Great square, amid the almost deafening exultations of the promiscuous assemblage. The prisoner, who was a young American, had been captured near Santa Fé, and without any apparent cause other than the vending of Yankee knick-knacks, was condemned to suffer death by the *garotte*. The prisoner, bare-headed, with red locks streaming over his shoulders, walked bare-footed in the centre of a detachment, who goaded him on with their bayonets, while he gave them in return looks of defiance and contempt.

As they passed the noble Cascara's palace, the front balcony of which

was filled with ladies, and among them shone most conspicuously Doña Isabella, the condemned turned his eyes imploringly towards the balcony, and encountered the pitiful gaze of this beautiful lady.

'Father,' said Isabella, to a middle-aged gentleman who was watching the procession from the casement; 'that man deserves not death!'

'You speak confidently, my child,' answered Don Antonio Cascara.—'Can Santa Anna condemn ere a man's guilt be proven?'

'Of that I dare not judge,' resumed Isabella; 'but there is a certain something in the strange prisoner's countenance, which assures me he would not commit a deed deserving capital punishment. Have you not sufficient influence to save him?'

'No, child, he is sentenced to die and the President seldom revokes his will.'

The conversation was here interrupted by a new object of attraction, and cries of '*Viva el Libertador! Viva Santa Anna!*' filled the air as a cavalcade halted at the gate of Cascara's palace. It consisted of the President, and his six Aids-de-camp, arrayed in their gorgeous military dresses, and mounted upon their superb and richly-caparisoned chargers. The gates were thrown open and they entered the court, where the illustrious visitor and retinue were received by the grandee who escorted them to the grand saloon.

Dona Isabella now entered and with a supplicating smile resting upon her lovely features, approached the President, who received her most graciously.

'*Qui hermosa!* how lovely!' said the President as he kissed her hand.

'The morning is indeed lovely!' replied Isabella, 'but its loveliness is marred by yon mournful spectacle!'

'Ay, Senorita! You refer to the execution of that rattle-pated Yankee *naranjo* ?'

'Si, Senor!'

'The *calavera* may feel thankful that I have appointed so pleasant a day for his execution!'

'Nay, nay, your Excellency would not condemn the innocent?'

'*Que vaya en hora mala!* Is he not a Yankee?' ejaculated Santa Anna.—'The fair Isabella would not plead for the life of a Yankee?'

'I would ever plead for the lives of the innocent?' replied Isabella indignantly. 'Did not his countrymen once spare thy life?'

'Be not so severe, fair Senorita. It is now too late. The Yankee must die!'

'For the love of God!' exclaimed Isabella, imploringly, 'spare his life!—For my sake—for thine! It is not yet too late!'

Thus saying the fair pleader seized his hand, and drew from his finger a ring, on which were engraved the armorial bearings of the President.

'*Gracias! gracias!*' cried she, as she hastened from the room.

'Such beauty would move the heart of a tyrant!' muttered Santa Anna.

In another moment Dona Isabella was in a carriage which was driven with all possible speed towards the place of execution.

During the brief interview of Santa Anna and the beautiful Senorita, preparations were in progress for the execution. The procession had arrived and the obstinate American, after considerable difficulty, was forced to mount the scaffold, where a Padre of the church awaited to hear his confession, and the executioner stood in readiness to perform the sanguinary duties of his office.

'*Laus Deo!*' said the Priest, approaching the prisoner.

'How are you?' replied the Yankee. 'I calculate I never saw your face afore! Now what mought your name be?'

'*Sante padre de Francisco!*' replied the priest.

'Wall, that is rayther a long one; now my name is Zeb Short, rather shorter than yours, Mister Santer Parderdy Sarn Francisco! That's a fine piece o' silk your gown is made on—I reckon that cost at least five-and-six a yard, and no 'thumbings.' Now I should jest like ter hear your business with me. If it's to buy a first rate time-keeper, why it's no use talkin', coz you see the dirty-faced soger-thieves, not only stole all the clocks but they stole all the other knick-knacks, including myself.'

'*Sante Madre de Dieu!*' exclaimed the priest raising both hands in pious horror.

'It's jest as true as the book of Maccabees, Mister Francisco, whether you believe it or not, so ye needn't look so tarnation suspicious. I wouldn't lie to you any quicker than I would to that are hang-dog cut-throat looking chap standing by that machine! But it's no use to talk, I can't trade with you not till I send off to the land of steady habits for another lot o' real 'eight dayers,' and no mistake.'

'*Jesus! que Demonio!* You have but a few moments to live! I come to pray with you!'

'Oh! you're the parson, ain't you?' resumed the Yankee. 'Wall now, that alters the case. 'Fore I hear any o' your prayers, I should jest like ter know what denomination you belong to?'

'To the only true church!' answered the priest.

'That's what I call dodging the question. What "platform" do you stand upon?' inquired the Yankee.

'*Dios de Cielo!* Are you not aware that we stand upon a scaffold, and at the portal of death?' asked the priest, misapprehending the word 'platform.'

'Another dodger, by the great horn spoons! Now, Mister Parson Francisco, I stand on the raal Simon Pure Calvinistic platform. If you're one o' that stamp, why I'll hear what you have to say.'

'*Santa Padre*——,' commenced the priest assuming a prayerful attitude.

'Hold on a bit,' interrupted Zebediah, looking grave. 'I should jest like

tu know, Mister Parson, before you proceed any farther, 'if all this ere show means any thing; 'coz I kinder reckon they've brought me up here jest ter see whether I had any grit or not!"

'In ten minutes you'll be in the bottomless pit!' exclaimed the priest angrily.

'I don't wish ter contradict the parson of this ere parish, but that'll depend pretty much on the circumstances of the case. If they've brought me here 'fore all these ere ragamuffins thinking to frighten me, why I shall be as cool as a cowcumber, and as unconcerned as a skeer-crow in a corn-field. I'm not to be skeered by a regiment of sich cut-throat looking vagabonds! But if they're in raal arnest and mean to murder me, my dander will rise to sich a pitch that I'll lick the hull boodle on 'em, the cap'in included. They'll find a Yankee's life is worth jest about as much as the hull lot!"

'What a devil! He is past redemption!' muttered the priest as he descended from the scaffold.

'Good bye, Mister Francisco?' returned Zebediah.

'*Picaro*—villain—thy time has arrived!' said the executioner, sternly, as he pointed towards the Mexican guillotine.

'What sort o' machine do you call that?' asked Zeb. 'It don't look much like a Connecticut invention.

'The *garotte*!' replied the executioner.

'Wall, I guess I never seed one afore in the hull course of my life. I'd jest like to understand the principles and operation of that are machine.—It's rayther a curious invention, but I'll lay a small wager a wooden clock'll beat it all holler.'

'Come! prepare thyself!"

'I'm prepared for any kind o' trade you'd like to make, from a two cent whistle to an 'eight-dayer.' What'll you take for that are gun o' yours? It's rayther stubbeder than a Connecticut 4th July swivel! I reckon it ain't much at a good Turkey-shot distance. I've got a rifle at hum that'll take the quirl from a pig's tail every shot!"

'Villain!' exclaimed the executioner, as he seized the Yankee by the collar and endeavored to affix the deadly instrument about his neck.

'Hands off!' said Zebediah, at the same time seizing him by the throat and tripping up his heels, which movement laid the executioner flat upon his back. 'Now I see that you are in arnest and do mean to murder me, may I be eaten up by maggits if I don't make crow's meat of some on ye!" continued he as the guard rushed upon the scaffold.

Zebediah had seized the executioner's carbine by the barrel, and now stood in a fearful attitude with the butt-end of it over his head, causing the guard to halt a few paces before him.

'Come on if ye've got any grit in ye, and I'll show ye how Samson killed

the Philistines with the jaw-bone of a jackass; and how the Yankees licked the British at Bunker-Hill without powder or ball; and how Davy Crockett slew an army of jist sich good-for-nothing cowardly cut-throats as you with nothing but a crazy old training musket without any lock! Oh, ye needn't stare so! It's true! and I can dew the same thing tew. If you come one single step furdur, I'll let the daylight into some o' yer cocoanuts!"

The executioner had now regained his feet, and made a second attempt, with the assistance of the guard, to secure the prisoner; in this they succeeded, but not until he had knocked down with the breech of his gun three or four of the assailants. In one moment longer, the valiant Yankee would have been no more, had not the executioner's arm been arrested by a female who appeared suddenly upon the scaffold. She held up her forefinger to his view—it operated like a talisman—Zeb Short was free!

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE RIVAL CHIEFTAINS IN MEXICO. VISIT TO SANTA ANNA. PRIVATE INTERVIEW. A VALUABLE GIFT.

Among the spectators of the singular scene in the *Plazuela de la Cebados* were Don Alvarado Núñez and Don Manuel Manrique, who had that morning arrived at the capital. As they were riding towards their quarters, they encountered a portion of the turbulent populace moving towards the Place of Execution, and thitherward they reined their steeds.

‘By San Iago, Alvarado,’ said Don Manuel, as they entered the square; ‘some unfortunate devil dies to day! See, the garotte is prepared, and there stands a holy father and an executioner cheek by jowl! and beneath them the gaping, beggarly scum of the metropolis!’

‘Another victim to the tyranny of the despot, I dare be sworn!’ replied Don Alvarado.

‘Speak not so loud, we may be overheard. Treason must not be spoken openly in the streets of Mexico.’

‘Call you that treason, Manrique? Methinks this must be an inquisitorial age, and that we live under an absolute monarchy, instead of a Republican form of government, where power is derived from the people!’

‘Be silent, cousin, I intreat thee! Santa Anna, like Dionysius, hears all that can be construed into treason! But see, the procession comes. The condemned looks not like a Mexican—nor a Spaniard—nor a Frenchman. He’s an American!’

‘On my life, then, a true Republican!’ added Núñez, enthusiastically.—‘Santa Anna hates America and her liberty-loving people!’

‘You must use more discretion, Alvarado, or I cannot ensure thy safety,’ replied Don Manuel, angrily.

‘Not so, Manrique! I’ll stake my life that the American is innocent of any crime whatsoever. Mark his countenance! Is not honesty strongly depicted there? and by my faith, courage, too?’

‘By San Lorenzo! he takes it coolly!’ said Manrique. ‘He looks upon the scene as complacently as if it were a wedding, and he the happiest of bridegrooms? See the indifferent smile he bestows occasionally upon his guard. They have halted—he ascends the scaffold reluctantly—the soldiers spur him up! The priest speaks to him. By my soul, I believe he jests

with the holy padre! The executioner points to the deadly instrument. He is now talking to him. Well, that is decidedly the most deliberate specimen of coolness I ever witnessed. Once in the executioner's hands his neck will break in a *brinco*! Dios de Cielo! he seems determined to fight. Sure enough, there's a tumult! Que Demonio!

While Manrique was giving utterance to these expressions, Don Alvarado's gaze was following the movements of a lady, who had a moment previously passed by him in a carriage, and who seemed to scrutinize his features with intense interest as she moved along. He could see nothing but her eyes, for her other features were concealed beneath a veil; but there was a certain indescribable expression in those dark lustrous orbs that convinced him he was recognized, notwithstanding the precaution he had taken to disguise himself. To his utter amazement he saw her alight from the carriage and make her way through the wretched mass to the scaffold.—She had reached the steps ere she was observed by his companions.

'Santa Maria!' exclaimed Don Manuel. Look! a lady appears upon the scaffold! That dignified figure—that step—surely I cannot err! It is Dona Isabella de Cascara!

'What can have brought the lady Isabella hither?'

'She holds her finger towards the executioner!'

'Si, si, he is pardoned! Laus Deo!' exclaimed Don Alvarado, rapturously. 'An angel of love upon an errand of mercy!'

The disappointed crowd were now dispersing, while the disguised cavaliers watched intently the movements of Dona Isabella. She descended from the scaffold followed by the courageous Yankee, who was meanwhile lavishing his thanks upon her for her intercession, and complimenting in his crude manner her wondrous beauty. Before she seated herself in the carriage, she gave him her father's address, and bade him repair to the palace forthwith.

Again she rode by the disguised cavaliers, and more intently than before gazed upon Senor Nunez, which circumstance did not this time escape the notice of Don Manuel.

At length the Plazuela was nearly deserted, and our cavaliers took their way towards the *Gran Sociedad*, at the corner of the two principal streets, Espiritu Santo and del Refugio, where each secured a *suite* of private apartments. Manrique proposed to Nunez an immediate visit to the president, and after apparelling themselves in a suitable manner, a carriage was ordered and they proceeded together towards the palace of the supreme Executive of the Republic. On their arrival Don Manuel, in an authoritative tone demanded admission to the reception-room, which was quickly granted on his displaying the ring upon fore-finger.

His Excellency Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, surrounded by his six Aid-de-camps and other official dignitaries, all arrayed in their splendid military uniforms, was seated under a canopy of crimson velvet, ornament-



ed with gold and silver, awaiting the entrance of the cavaliers who were announced. Don Manuel first entered and saluted the President.

'Welcome, Señor!' said Santa Anna, rising. 'You have arrived in good time.'

'Many thanks!' replied Manrique. 'I crave a private audience with your Excellency.'

'At your service, Senor,' replied the president; and waving his hand to the officers in attendance they retired from the apartment.

'The gallant Colonel Nunez, whom you have long desired to meet, I have at length prevailed upon to visit your Excellency,' said Manrique. He is yet an enemy of thine, but I have a strong hope that he may be induced to enlist in thy service.'

'Bid thy friend approach. The zeal and faithfulness which you manifest in our behalf shall not pass unrewarded.'

The bandit chief now summoned Nunez from the ante-room, who approached the president, and was received by him with that winning smile which he is capable of forcing into his countenance whenever it is required.

'Of all men in Mexico I have most desired thy acquaintance and friendship,' said he.

'Your Excellency does me much honor!' replied Don Alvarado.

'We have long been political enemies, Señor Nunez?' said Santa Anna, enquiringly.

'Si, your Excellency.'

'I trust the time is not far distant when we may meet as friends.'

'Your Excellency is condescending. I desire peace with all mankind.'

'I have heard much of thy gallant behavior in Gautemala; and have learned that thy cavaliers are brave and well disciplined.'

'I can bear testimony to the truth of what you have heard,' remarked the bandit. 'They are, indeed, gallant fellows; and in the maintenance of the defence and safety and tranquility of the Republic, they would prove more efficient than ten times their number of any cavalry in Mexico.'

'I doubt it not, Senor,' replied the President. 'Colonel Nunez, I desire to enlist thyself and force in the cause of the Republic. You have but to name the conditions and our compact shall be forthwith executed.'

'I am not prepared at this time to make a proposal.'

'Believe me, thou shalt fare well at our hands. I promise to restore to thee the confiscated estates which thy deceased father once held; one hundred *talegas* in silver; a high rank in our army, and any other favor within my official capacity to grant.'

'Your Excellency is, indeed, lavish of his gifts. I beg leave, however, a few days to consider the matter, and communicate with my subordinates.'

'I grant thee ten days' resumed the President. 'If at the expiration of that period my proposal is accepted, report thyself at the palace. If however it is rejected, I give thee ten hours longer to leave the capital, and five

days to leave the Republic! Take this ring,' continued he, 'it is my signet—it will serve thee until the time shall have expired.'

'I thank thee. Thy exceedingly generous proposal shall have its due weight,' replied Nunez. 'Buénas tardès, Excellentísimo Senor,' added he as he arose to depart.

'Buénos días, Colonel,' replied Santa Anna.

The President and Manrique being now alone, the latter took from a casket a diamond tiara of great value and presented it to his excellency, for his daughter.

'This jewel,' remarked Manrique, 'will become the fair brow of the Senorita de Santa Anna.'

The President received the precious gift, and declared that the diamonds excelled in lustre and value any that he had ever beheld, and promised that the Senorita should wear them at the great ball to be given in a few weeks at the *Mineria* in honor of himself.

'In ten days,' continued Manrique, 'a remittance of gold and silver and precious stones will be sent thee, amounting in value to nearly five hundred *talegas*, thy full proportion of our labors.'

The President expressed his surprise at the wonderful success of the Brigands, and made new promises to afford them every protection in his power. He then alluded to his promise previously made to Manrique touching the beautiful Isabella de Cascara, and informed him that he had broached the subject to the General, who regarded the matter favorably, and that he would continue to urge the matter with that gentleman, and had no doubt of his ultimate success.

A company of distinguished visitors being now announced, Don Manuel took his departure, and repaired to the *Gran Sociedad*, whither Nunez had preceded him.

## CHAPTER VII.

ZEB SHORT VISITS ALVARADO NUNEZ. THE JOYOUS SUMMONS. THE INTERVIEW. ISABELLA DE CASCARA. STARTLING REVELATION. THE ATTEMPT AT ASSASSINATION.

On the third evening subsequent to the events of the last chapter, Alvarado Nunez was seated at an open window of his apartments, which overlooked the palace-gardens of the rich and powerful Cascara. The full moon arose from her orient bed, and shed her silvery brightness upon the many spires and domes of the Mexican capital; the stars twinkled like diamonds from their spheres, and the vast expanse above was without a cloud or speck to mar its translucence. It was, indeed, a lovely night; and as Alvarado rested upon the casement, he listened to the song of a fair Senorita, whose ravishing tones came forth from a bower of the garden but a short distance from him. At length the last sound ceased, and a female figure, arrayed in white, glided along the flower-bordered path, and thrice it passed beneath his window. Nunez doubted not that this was the form of the fair Isabella, whom he had not seen since his arrival in the city, deeming her lost to him, on account of her father's having espoused the cause of Santa Anna, and his detested rival's influence with the usurper. For the space of half an hour he watched the garden walks, hoping again to catch a glimpse of the fair being who haunted his mind, when a rap upon the door startled him. He arose and opened it, when the honest features of Zebediah Short, the pugnacious Yankee, were revealed to him. It instantly occurred to Nunez that this visitor was a messenger from Dona Isabella.

'How d'ye dew,' said Zeb, as he took off his broad-brimmed hat.

'Walk in, Senor,' said Don Alvarado.

'That's not my name—Zeb Short if you please. What may I venter to call your name?'

'Alvarado Nunez!'

'Then you're the chap I've been lookin' arter all over this tarnal grea city, and if you hadn't been star-gazing out o' that ere winder this evenin,'

I might ha' hunted till the next Fourth o' July and not have found hide nor hair on ye.'

'Well, sir, now that you have found me I am at your service,' replied Alvorado.

'Wall, now I spose that's as much as to say you'd be glad to have me explain my business.

'Precisely so, sir.'

Zeb fumbled over his pockets and taking out a greasy looking paper he unfolded it and produced a neat rose-scented billet-doux. 'I reckon this letter'll explain the hull business.

Nunez took the missive and read as follows.

"Tuesday eve'g, 9th Sept.

*Mi querido Alvorado—*

Notwithstanding thy disguise I easily recognized thee. I tremble, Alvorado, for thy safety, and advise that every precaution be taken lest thy enemies discover thee. I dare not ask thee to come openly to the palace, but if you would see me, be guided by the faithful American. He will lead thee to a place in the garden, where I shall await thy coming.

Thine, forever,

ISABELLA."

He pressed the note to his lips, and hastily prepared to obey the summons of love. The gloomy forebodings which had dwelt upon his mind now gave place to happier emotions.

'Here's a purse of gold for thy fidelity,' said Nunez. 'Lead the way, I will follow.'

'Real yellow-boys, and no mistake!' replied Zeb in extacies, as he examined the contents of his purse. 'I'll follow you and Miss Isabel to the end o' the airth, and fight till I die for ye. Come along, I'll lead ye into a small pocket-edition of paradise in about three minutes! There's my sweet-heart, Nance Buttercup, who lives in Conneticut—I don't spose you was ever in the land o' steady habits—wall, she's the handsomest critter that I ever sot eyes on, but she's no more to be compared to Miss Isabel than a buttercup is to a full-blown rosy.'

Don Alvorado, and the voluble Yankee issued from the Gran Sociedad, entered the palace-garden, and pursued their way stealthily along through the thick shrubbery until they approached a latticed bower in a secluded part of the garden, where the lovers met, and after the first ebullition of fervent love had subsided, Nunez recounted the various events which had transpired since their last meeting, and also the cause of his visit to the capital. Eagerly did Dona Isabella listen to the scenes of deadly strife and peril in which he had acted a conspicuous part; and many a sympathetic tear stole down her fair cheeks during the recital.

The daughter of the grandee was a being possessed of no ordinary personal charms, and we marvel not that she had captivated our stout-hearted,

gallant and brave hero on their first meeting, which had occurred two years previously at a fête at the palace of Bustamente, while that true hearted patriot was at the head of the National Government. Isabella had now reached her eighteenth year, and being endowed with high intellectual powers, she had readily acquired all those accomplishments befitting her high rank, and which so much adorn female character; and she had also made it her study to promote the happiness and comfort of her parents, and being an only child she was almost worshipped by them. It was not the rare intellectual qualities she possessed, nor the accomplishments she had acquired, nor the gentleness and amiability of her disposition, that made her the theme of admiration and adulation among the gay *noblesse* of the capital, but for her transcendent loveliness, which outshone the fairest beauties of the land. The most symmetrical nymph-like creations of the immortal artists of Greece and Rome, would not, in emulation with her, have borne away the victory for gracefulness of mien and symmetry of figure. Her eyes too were dark and lustrous as the gazelle's; her complexion clear as alabaster; and the dimpled cheek, the rose-colored lips, and a perfect set of pearly-white teeth lent to her smile an undefinable sweetness that was irresistibly captivating. Her hair of raven hue flowed luxuriantly over her snowy-white neck and shoulders, completing the outline of her graceful figure. Such a being was Isabella de Cascara, the betrothed of him who was now seated by her side clasping her small delicate hand within his own.

'I thank Heaven, Alvarado,' said the Senorita, 'that thy life has been spared through so many sanguinary conflicts; and it gives me ineffable joy once more to see thee!'

'Gladly would I again expose my life for moments of bliss like these!'

'Nay, nay, hazard nothing. I fear now that thy visit to Mexico, among powerful enemies, may prove thy destruction. Trust not the perfidious Manrique, albeit he is thy kinsman and seemeth thy friend!'

'Fear not, my beloved. I have watched his movements well.'

'He is almost constantly with my father. He claims my hand, Alvarado, and through the influence of the President, I fear he may be prevailed upon yield his consent.'

'And thou, Isabella ——'

'Will die, ere I become his bride!'

'The presumptuous villain! I marvel that I have not, ere this, annihilated him!'

'Be discreet, Alvarado. All may yet be well. My father likes him not, and would not cheaply sacrifice me. When he has left the palace, you shall be introduced to my father. He knew thy sire well, and hath heard good report of thee.'

Zebediah Short, who acted as sentinel to the bower, was now summoned, and despatched to the palace to ascertain when Manrique should take his leave. Half an hour elapsed ere the Yankee returned, but to the blissful

overs it seemed but momentary. They now proceeded to the palace, and entered the audience apartment of General Cascara, where they found him alone. Isabella presented Alvarado to her father, who though evidently surprised upon hearing his name, received him courteously.

'General Cascara! Can it be possible?' ejaculated Nunez, startled at the resemblance he bore to the individual whom he had succored in the barranca of the Black Forest.

'Buena venida!' said the General. Pray be seated—I knew thy father well—he was a brave and good man; and I have heard much to commend of thee. Were a price not set upon thy head I should be better pleased to see thee now, for I fear much for thy safety.'

'For ten days at least I am secure from arrest!' remarked Alvarado.

'What security?' asked Cascara.

'The signet of the President?' answered Alvarado, as he displayed the fore-finger of his right hand.

Cascara shook his head, as if doubting the virtue of the jewel.

'Ah! what do I see?' he exclaimed in a startled manner. 'Excuse me,' continued he, as he withdrew his eyes from a diamond that sparkled beside the signet.

'Mistaken in what, dear father?' asked the Señorita, eagerly.

'I ask thy pardon, caballero,' said the grandee, 'I was struck by the brilliancy of a diamond ring upon your finger.'

'Santa Maria!' ejaculated Isabella; how much it resembles the one that I gave to the gallant——'

'Please examine it!' interrupted Nunez, handing the ring to Isabella. 'It was presented me by a lady whom I had rendered a trifling service.'

'And that lady was——'

'To me a perfect stranger,' added Nunez. 'She would not unveil her features—therefore I was deprived the pleasure of knowing from whom I received the precious gem.'

'It is the same, dear father!' cried Isabella, as she again placed the ring upon his finger. 'It was, indeed, Alvarado Nunez who saved our lives and our treasures!'

'Is it possible, that we have met unbeknown to each other, Isabella?—True—it must be so—when I first entered the room, I was struck with the resemblance your father bore to one whom I had encountered somewhere in a scene of danger!'

'Blessings be upon thee, brave youth!' exclaimed the grandee. 'But for thy timely succor we should inevitably have perished! Never shall I forget that dark ravine—that awful scene of peril! Oftentimes have I repented that I did not take thy word and advice. We owe thee more than our eternal gratitude! Speak but thy wishes and by our holy faith if within my power they shall be gratified!'

'Thanks, noble Cascara!' replied Alvarado. 'I have now but one favor to ask.'

‘Name it!’

‘Pledge me thy word that Don Manuel Manrique shall never have thy consent to wed the Senorita de Cascara!’

‘I do promise!’ said the grandee, taking Alvarado’s hand; ‘and may the vengeance of a just deity be upon me whenever I revoke the pledge!’

‘Enough! I am satisfied!’ replied Nunez.

‘Father, you have made me happy!’ said Isabella, as she threw her arms about his neck and kissed his wrinkled brow.

‘Twice,’ at length said the grandee, ‘have I been attacked near the Star-Mountain. I trust that the day is not far distant when a traveller may pursue his way through any part of Mexico without apprehending danger at every step.’

‘Amen!’ responded Nunez. ‘But I fear such a state of things will not exist in our day and generation.’

‘It was near the Star-Mountain, father, that my mother was robbed of a tiara of beautiful diamonds,’ remarked the Señorita.

‘Indeed!’ exclaimed Nunez, for he remembered the precious jewel that Manrique had shown him.

‘Know you the leader of the robbers who attacked us?’ enquired the grandee.

‘Si, Senor, I know him well! and he shall yet be known to thee! Suffice it now to say that he is under the protection of the President; and I have good cause to believe that in consideration thereof, he pays his master tribute at the government palace!’

‘By my faith, thy words astound me!’ exclaimed the grandee; ‘and yet I feel their truth. The treachery of the government troops who acted as my escort perhaps can now be accounted for. It is yet a mystery what has become of them—they have not reported themselves at the citadel, nor has one of their number ever been heard from!’

‘And never will, be assured! They were cut in pieces in ten minutes after their perfidy by my orders. Not one escaped!’

‘Dios de Cielo! A just punishment. Henceforth, Alvarado Nunez, account me a foe to the existing powers of Mexico! I’ll no longer be duped by the cunning persuasiveness of the despot.’

‘Give me thy hand, General!’ said Nunez, warmly. ‘The day is not far distant when the chains which now bind Mexico to the dust shall be rent in twain! Let us arise in our might and hurl the tyrant from the high and responsible station which he has usurped.’

Isabella now bade her father and lover good night, and retired. Long after midnight did Cascara and Nunez commune together upon the noble cause of freeing their country from the sway of the despot.

It was on this occasion that the grandee sanctioned the loves of Alvarado and Isabella, and promised that their nuptials should be celebrated soon as the contemplated revolution should be effected.

As Nunez was leaving the court of the palace, he heard the rustling of

leaves proceeding from a clump of bushes almost directly in his path. Instantly he drew his rapier, and as he passed the point which drew his attention, a figure, enveloped in a cloak, sprung upon him and endeavored to plunge a stiletto into his bosom. Nunez arrested the assassin's band, and with a single stroke of his rapier, severed the fingers which held the stiletto from the hand, and they dropped to the earth! The assassin uttered an unearthly yell, and with a rush bounded from the garden! Nunez gathered up the amputated fingers and stiletto, and placing them in his handkerchief, he continued his way and reached his apartments without being again molested.

Judge of the surprise of Nunez, when, on examining the contents of his handkerchief, he found upon one of the fingers, a ring corresponding with the signet he had received from Santa Anna! and he doubted not that the assassin was none other than the Bandit Chief!



## CHAPTER VIII.

MANRIQUE SWEARS THE DESTRUCTION OF CASCARA AND NUNEZ. INTERVIEW WITH SANTA ANNA. THE PLOT TO SEIZE THE MOUNTAIN CASTLE. NUNEZ ARRESTED. THE COUNTERPLOT. EFFICIENT ACTION OF ZEB SHORT. HIS BOLD ADVENTURES. THE SIEGE. DEFEAT OF THE ASSAILANTS.

To account for the singular attempt at assassination mentioned in the conclusion of the previous chapter, the reader will recollect that Manrique was at the palace in the early part of the evening; and it being known to him that Isabella was in the garden, he strongly suspected that she was holding 'sweet communion' with a rival, and he at once resolved to know who the favored one was. Leaving the palace much earlier than usual, he concealed himself near by a path which he knew they must pass. Soon the lovers appeared, and to his surprise he saw the beautiful Isabella leaning fondly upon the arm of Alvarado Nunez. Jealousy and rage now kindled in his bosom, and he vowed within himself to seek a fearful vengeance ere he slept. Hastening to his lodgings he disguised himself, and returned to the garden. Stealthily he entered the palace, and sought concealment behind the heavy drapery of a window in an ante-room adjoining the apartment where the grandee, his daughter and Nunez were seated, and here the startling developments of their interview fell like molten lead upon his heart. On hearing Nunez arise to depart, he hastened out before him and again concealed himself among the garden shrubbery. What followed is already known to the reader.

Early on the morning subsequent to the intended murder, Manrique arose from his couch where he had spent an hour or two of feverish restlessness, and ordering a carriage, drove to the house of a surgeon, where he unbound his mutilated hand and displayed it to the surgeon. Two fingers from the right hand were gone, and a third hung by the tendons. The wounds were dressed, and the excruciating pain being somewhat assuaged, he forthwith repaired to a hotel in a secluded part of the city, where he remained until he had recovered from the debility which the loss of blood and sleep had caused him.

Here he had an opportunity to contemplate the events of the few past

days and their probable consequences, and to originate plans for his future guidance.

‘By heavens an awful retribution awaits them!’ muttered he with clenched teeth, as he paced the floor. ‘Yes! it must be so! To Santa Anna will I reveal all! Nunez shall be taken care of first! and then the hoary-headed old villain shall be thrust into the *Acordada*! Once there his daughter’s hand shall be the price of his release! If he refuse, the garotte! the executioner! shall bend him to my will! He has pledged his daughter to Nunez! Ha! ha! my gallant kinsman must die! But how to regain possession of my mountain castle? I have it!’ continued he at length. ‘I must prevail upon the President for a detachment of troops to surprise it; and to make the attack doubly sure, I will despatch a trusty messenger to Garcilazo, who will cooperate with the government troops on their arrival. Yes, the plan is feasible, and I will forthwith repair to the palace, and lay the subject before the President.’

Saying this, the Bandit Chief, with his mutilated hand resting in a sling, issued into the street and bent his steps towards the government palace on foot. He gained access to the President immediately on his arrival, and requesting a private interview they retired into a small apartment.

‘I have astounding intelligence for your ears!’ said Manrique as they seated themselves. ‘Know ye, that General Cascara’s escort was cut to pieces by order of Alvorado Nunez!’

‘Ha! How’s this? Did not you introduce him to our presence?’ demanded Santa Anna.

‘I did, your Excellency; but it was ere I had heard this startling intelligence. It was during an interview with General Cascara that he confessed it in my hearing.’

‘Knew you not of this before?’ enquired Santa Anna in a tone of doubt and suspicion.

‘No! your Excellency!’ replied Manrique, firmly. ‘I afterwards charged Nunez with the deed—he denied it—whereupon, a quarrel ensued, and I suffered the loss of two fingers from my sword-hand in the encounter!—Here is the proof!’ added he, displaying his wounded hand.

‘Enough! I am convinced! I will issue an order for his immediate arrest, and revoke the protection I gave him!’

‘I have other important intelligence to communicate!’ said Manrique.

‘I am all attention, good Senor Manrique. I pray thee, proceed.’

‘General Antonio de Cascara is thine enemy! He seeks thy overthrow!’

‘Ha! Cascara a traitor?’ ejaculated Santa Anna. ‘By San Diego, I have already entertained suspicions of him! How learned you this?’

‘On entering his palace, late at night, I heard the voices of the grandee and Nunez. I stopped and listened, and heard them swear thy overthrow! They branded thee with the epithets of tyrant, despot, usurper and robber!’

‘Ha! said they so! My vengeance shall surely overtake them!’ and Santa Anna rung for his private Secretary, who was ordered to execute a war-

rant for the arrest of Alvarado Nunez. 'Ere to-morrow's sun hath set, Cascara shall follow him! Thus shall be the fate of all who oppose me!

Manrique now related to the President the present situation of his mountain retreat, and requested a detachment of troops to aid him in surprising it. This request was readily granted, and Manrique appointed the next day for his expedition to the Black Forest. He now left the President and sought out a noted bandit, who had formerly been in his service. To him he entrusted the care of secret despatches to Garcilazo, and bade him hasten to the cave with all possible speed. The task was undertaken, and ere nightfall of the next day the courier was spurring his steed far away from the gates of the city, while Manrique with a detachment of fifty well-mounted cavaliers followed slowly in the same direction.

We will now return to our brave chieftain, Alvarado Nunez. On the evening preceding Manrique's setting out for the Black Forest, he was repairing to the abode of his beloved Isabella, when, just as he was entering the court, a file of armed soldiery marched up and arrested him, and after securing him by chains, bore him away to the Acordada. In vain he protested against this outrage, and demanded his release by virtue of Santa Anna's signet, but the bauble availed him nothing, and indignantly he tore it from his finger and crushed it beneath his feet! He was cast into one of the low filthy dungeons of the Acordada! But he did not despair! The love and constancy of his adored Isabella, was enough to sustain his stout heart even within the filthy and gloomy walls of the Bastile of Mexico.

Alvarado's arrest was viewed from the balcony of the palace by Senor de Cascara and his daughter. When she beheld him she so ardently loved in the power of the prison soldiers, she uttered a piercing scream and, faintly, sunk into her father's arms. Servants were summoned and restoratives ordered, and by proper treatment, she in a short time recovered.

'Father!' cried she, soon as she could give utterance to her thoughts;— 'What is to be done? Cannot Alvarado be freed?'

'Be calm, my child! I fear my influence with Santa Anna will not save him! And Heaven only knows how soon I may have to follow Nunez!'

'God forbid! that the guiltless shall suffer, and the guilty go unpunished!'

'They shan't touch a hair on his head!' said Zeb Short, who was a witness of the scene from the garden, and had now hastened to the balcony. 'Jest leave the hull bizness to me, and if I don't manage it 'cordin' to the rules o' gunter, I hope never to see the stars and stripes and Nance Buttercup agin in the hull course o' my life.'

'By my faith, the American speaks sanguinely,' said the grandee; 'and there is so much cunning in his honest face, that I have much confidence in his words.'

'Jest say the word, General, and I'm off to that infarnal prison like a streak o' greased lightning!'

'Take this signet,' said Isabella, placing the ring she had received from Santa Anna on the Yankee. 'It may assist thee!'

'Thank ye, Miss Isabel,' replied Zeb. 'I wonder what Nance would say could she see this pure gold ring on my little finger? I reckon she'd be a leetle jealous if she knew who gin it me! Wall, General, and Miss Isabel, good bye. When you see this ere child agin, you'll hear good news, depend on't!'

'You understand the virtue of that ring?' said Isabella, enquiringly.

'Wall I guess I do! I reckon it once saved my neck from a twisting.'

Saying this, the Yankee disappeared, and with a nimble gait pursued his way towards the prison, in which Nunez was confined. Arriving at the portal he demanded, pompously, in the name of the President, admittance to the cell of Alvorado, at the same time displaying the signet. His authoritative manner, together with the ring, had the desired effect, and bolts and bars and locks yielded before him, and he stood in the presence of him he sought. Nunez instantly recognised the Yankee, and knew him to be a messenger sent from the Senorita.

'How d'ye do?' said the Yankee. 'I've come to set ye free! Jest you slip on these ere trousers, this ere coat, and this ere hat, and this red wig, jest the color o' my own hair, and you'll pass by the guard for Zeb Short jest as easy as I could dew it myself.' And Zeb commenced divesting himself of an extra suit which he had put on over his usual dress for this particular occasion before he left the palace.

'What means this?' demanded Alvorado.

'Jump yourself into this Sunday-go-to meeting dress o' mine—and make tracks for the palace—the gal's e'en a most dying to see you.'

'What is to become of you?'

'Zeb Short has wit enough to take care o' himself. I've seen the inside of this tarnal lock-up afore! Come, fly round, there's no time to lose!'

'No, my good fellow, I will not save my life at the expense of another's,' replied Nunez. 'But if you are disposed to do me a favor in another and less hazardous way, you shall be well paid.'

'Name it—I'm up to any thing to serve you and Miss Isabel.'

'It is to leave the city to-morrow morning, mounted upon a fleet steed, with secret despatches for my lieutenant, who is quartered with my force in a cave of the Orizava mountain.'

'I'll dew it!' replied Zeb, promptly. 'Jest point out the road, and other particulars, and fore the first streak o' day I'll be off.'

Nunez prepared his despatches, and gave the Yankee minute instructions in order to enable him to find the cave. Zeb now took his departure, and ere he slept that night his arrangements for the journey were completed.—According to his promise, the next morning, mounted upon Alvorado's steed, the Yankee passed the gates of the city without molestation, on his expedition to the cave of the bandits.

About sunset on the following day, he had reached the mule path leading to the plain contiguous to the robbers' cave, when he encountered another horseman who was pursuing the same direction.

'Whither bound, caballero?' demanded the stranger, as he reined in his horse beside Zeb Short.

'What would you give tew know?' returned Zeb, eyeing the stranger suspiciously, and observing a pistol in his hand.

'Answer me, picaro, or I'll blow your brains out?'

'Wall, I guess now there'll be a pair o' brains blown out?' said Zeb, as he drew forth a horse pistol, and aimed it at the head of the stranger, who at the moment discharged his pistol at Zeb, the ball striking the lock of his weapon.

'There, Mister, you've e'en a most spilt my pistol,' continued the Yankee, 'and may I be flabergasted if I don't make crows meat on ye.'

Zeb drew a sword which Nunez had provided him, while his antagonist drew another pistol, and ere he succeeded in cocking it, Zeb gave him a blow over the head, which knocked him from his horse. Dismounting, the Yankee secured a package of papers which had fallen from the hat of his now senseless foe, and again bestriding his beast, he carefully followed the labarynthine path which had been described by Nunez, and succeeded in reaching the plain. Placing a horn to his lips, he blew the signal blast, which was soon answered by a dozen mounted cavaliers, headed by Enrique Canazilla, who appeared suddenly in the presence of the Yankee courier. The cavalier leader rode up and accosted him, when he made known the cause of his mission and presented his despatches. Zeb was now invited to the hospitalities of the cave, and with wondering eyes he accompanied Canazilla through the subterranean apartments, and entering a private room, they were soon in close conference on the important business before them. After Canazilla had perused the despatches from his superior officer, Zeb produced a package addressed to Garcilazo, and explained the singular manner by which they came into his possession.—Canazilla, without hesitation, broke the seal and there learned, to his amazement, that the cave would be besieged by government troops, under the command of Manrique himself, who expected the co-operation of Garcilazo and the brigands from within, the moment the castle was surprised!

Astounding as was the disastrous intelligence, Canazilla acted with that prudence and discretion which become more experienced officers. Without communicating with his brother officers, he summoned to the armory the two corps, where he openly proclaimed to all present the perfidy of Manrique in attempting to assassinate and afterwards causing the imprisonment of Don Alvorado; and that in accordance with the terms agreed upon ere they set out for Mexico, this mountain retreat is forfeited to Colonel Nunez and his followers, and to all who will now enlist in his cause.

Many of the bandits began to demur, and on Garcilazo's manifesting a disposition to make a desperate effort to regain possession of the cave, Canazilla ordered his arrest, which, on being attempted, several of the brigands rallied around him, and a desperate conflict ensued. The bandits were soon overpowered, and several, including Garcilazo, were put in irons, and

dragged to the dungeons of the cavern. The remainder of the bandits swore allegiance to Nunez through Canazilla. The gallant young officer now disclosed the startling fact that a body of government troops were on their way from the capital to besiege their strong-hold, and bade his followers to arm themselves for the expected attack.

Meanwhile, Manrique and his borrowed force were slowly climbing the mountain, and ere they reached the mule-path the night was nearly spent, and the full moon which had lighted them on their way was now declining towards the western horizon. Here they halted to refresh themselves from the weariness of their rapid journey from the capital, and to prepare themselves for the assault, which Manrique determined to make before day-break. The groans of some one in distress now fell upon the ears of the troop, and the figure of a man, crawling upon his hands and knees issued from the thicket.

‘El Demonio!’ exclaimed Manrique. ‘It is my bearer of despatches! Roberto Valdes, how’s this?’

The wounded man, in feeble tones, related the encounter which we have described, but could give no information as to who his victorious antagonist was.

‘By San Pedro! I like not this! Garcilazo by this unfortunate occurrence is unapprised of our intentions. Nevertheless, brave comrades, we may rely upon his co-operation when he hears the sound of his chieftain’s clarion!’

The troops were once more in their saddles, moving onward towards the cave; and as they cautiously emerged from the thick wood into the plain, they were suddenly thrown into confusion by a volley of musquetry, from Canazilla’s force, which laid in ambush but a few rods distant! In another moment, ere Manrique could rally his troop, Canazilla ordered his men to charge. They were met in the open space by Manrique and his now scattered force, and desperate and bloody was the conflict! The thought of being defeated where he anticipated an easy victory, maddened him, and like a chafed lion, he rushed amid the thickest of his foes and dealt his blows with a desperate fury! Finding himself fighting almost alone, his troops having either been cut down or having fled, he thrust the rowels of his spurs deep into his horse, and ere his flight could be arrested, he succeeded in reaching a secret path of the wood, by which he almost miraculously made his escape.

Nearly the whole detachment fell in the conflict, and Manrique, stung with mortification and disappointment, reached the citadel of Mexico, accompanied by the miserable remnant of his detachment, consisting of not more than eight or ten men, part of whom were sorely wounded!

## CHAPTER IX.

## CONCLUSION.

A month had now elapsed since the occurrences, briefly narrated in the last chapter, had transpired. Santa Anna had carried his threat in regard to General Cascara into execution—he was a prisoner of the *Acordada*! and with Alvorado Nunez had been condemned to die upon the garotte, on the charge of high treason! The day appointed for their execution was near at hand, and no hope seemed remaining for them! Vainly, upon her knees, before the relentless Santa Anna, did the beauteous Isabella sue for the pardon of her father and lover! Vainly did she implore of the vindictive Manrique to exercise his influence with the despot! He answered her pleadings only by demanding her hand as the price of becoming her intercessor! She asked for permission to visit her father in his cell, but the tyrant's inhumanity forbade her even this! In despair and almost broken-hearted she returned to her lone home, and in the seclusion of her closet, offered fervent petitions to her Heavenly Father in behalf of the guiltless prisoners!

The day of the execution dawned! The sun arose in glorious majesty, as if to sanction the deadly mandate of the usurper, and to mock the hearts of those who were on that day condemned to death! The place of execution was early thronged with the curious multitude to behold the noble Cascara and brave Nunez die!

In a neighboring square was another concourse of people attracted thither by a very different motive, and among the number were conspicuous Santa Anna and his *suite*, in their glittering uniforms and mounted upon their superbly caparisoned chargers. The square was occupied as a mart for the sale of horses, and on the evening previous a caravan, consisting of one hundred and fifty, with their owners and grooms, arrived in the capital, purporting to have come from Santa Fé. Their extreme value and beauty commanded the attention of the President, whose love for horses is well known to Mexicans. He selected a stud of twenty-five; but the exorbitant price demanded for them, was too much even for the rich Santa Anna. Finding the horse-dealers inflexible, he declined purchasing, and took his departure.

The great bell of the cathedral now slowly pealed forth its mournful sounds, as the procession of the condemned left the gloomy walls of the *Acordada*, and proceeded towards Plazuela de la Cebada. The entire avail-

able force of the citadel acted as escort to the noble prisoners. Side by side walked the veteran Cascara and the youthful Nunez! and in their rear the holy fathers of the monastery of San Francisco. On arriving at the Place of Execution, the prisoners ascended the scaffold with a firm step! The priests had commenced the last duties of their office, when they were interrupted by the piercing screams of a female who suddenly appeared upon the scaffold, arrayed in a pure garb of white, with her dark glossy hair straying wildly over her neck and shoulders. It was Isabella de Cascara! This was the second time the multitude had beheld her upon that scaffold! Firmly did she cling about her father's neck, uttering wild and despairing shrieks! Vainly did the executioner attempt to separate them! Meanwhile murmurings from the populace, excited by sympathetic emotions, were distinctly heard. At length, through the aid of several of the guard, the daughter by force was dragged from her father's embrace! She uttered a heart-rending groan and fell, faintly, upon the scaffold!

The fatal machine was in readiness! The holy fathers were taking their final leave of the prisoners! All for a moment changed into a death-like stillness! when suddenly a large body of horsemen rushed into the square, and charged through the large force of armed soldiery which guarded the scaffold, filling the air with clamorous shouts of—'To the rescue! To the rescue! Viva Cascara! Viva Nunez! Down with Santa Anna! Death to the usurper!'

It was but the work of a moment! The guards were beaten down! The prisoners rescued! Two noble steeds were led to the foot of the scaffold, which were quickly mounted by the rescued prisoners! Swords were placed in their hands, and caps with plumes upon their heads! Meanwhile a fierce conflict commenced between the government force and the insurgents! the populace excited by sympathy and love for the veteran grandee, armed themselves with whatever weapons they could lay their hands upon, and seconded the rebellion! With Cascara and Nunez to lead them on, they bravely battled with the regulars, who were at length forced to retreat from the square. Santa Anna, in person, with the palace guards, now came to the aid of the retreating force, and for a time they sustained their position! Nunez appeared wherever the conflict raged most severe. Although somewhat enfeebled by his imprisonment, yet he seemed inspired with a new impulse that gave to his frame an almost supernatural power! His impetuosity was irresistible and his path was marked by the dead and the dying! Amid the conflict he espied the dark-looking form of the Brigand Chief, dealing deadly blows among the defenceless of the populace. In a moment he confronted him, exclaiming:

'Monster! thy time has come!'

The bloody Manrique attempted to avoid him; but the lion was too near his prey! With one well-directed blow of his powerful arm, the merciless desperado fell lifeless from his horse!

The battle still raged and through square after square the minions of



Santa Anna retreated before the now resistless conquerors! Finding still further effort useless, the usurper with a remnant of his troops turned and fled from the capital!

The city being now in the hands of the insurgents, order was again restored. The news of their success, like wildfire, spread throughout the Republic! The standard of rebellion was raised, and ultimately a complete revolution was effected!

Having now completed the bloody scenes of our 'Romance' (and we trust our kind and patient readers will believe it is meant for 'nothin' else') we will now render a few of its seeming improbabilities and inconsistencies more intelligible to those who have accompanied us through our task.

The Sante Fé horse dealers, whom we alluded to in the commencement of this chapter, were none others than the brave cavaliers of Alvarado Nunez, under the command of the youthful but gallant Enrique Canazilla, who had entered the gates of the capital so completely disguised that they caused not the slightest suspicion. Communicating with many known enemies of Santa Anna, Canazilla had secured the aid of a force nearly equalling that of the government's! It was first proposed to attack the Acordada early on the morning of the day appointed for the execution, but their judicious leader, deeming that their success depended almost entirely upon the minds of the mass of the populace, and knowing that their sympathies might be excited on beholding the noble Cascara, who was so much beloved by them, standing upon the scaffold, resolved to make the attack soon as the pre-concerted signal was given, that the executioner was preparing to perform his sanguinary task.

Soon as the prisoners were rescued the indefatigable Zeb Short made his appearance again beside the infernal machine! With one blow of an axe, which he had secured for the purpose, the deadly instrument fell to the ground, amid a shout of exultation from the populace! Zeb now gave three cheers—half Yankee and half Mexican—which met with another hearty response from the multitude! Lifting the partially revived Isabella in his left arm, and throwing the axe over his right shoulder, he descended triumphantly from the scaffold, and bore the beauteous maiden safely through scenes of deadly strife to the palace of her father. She had now completely revived, and from the balcony she beheld the tyrant's force flying from the city!

Soon as the strife was over, Cascara and Nunez proceeded towards the palace, escorted by Canazilla and his force, and followed by the multitude who rent the air with shouts of exultation! The lovely Isabella came forth to meet her victorious father and lover, and embraced them warmly.

'Did'n't I tell ye, General, that when you sot eyes agin on this ere child, you'd be as happy as a militia cap'in at a general muster?' ejaculated Zeb Short, soon as they had entered the grand saloon. 'I know'd it all the time. There was no use o' takin on.'

‘By my faith!’ replied the General, seizing Zeb by the hand. ‘This is our American friend! To him we owe our lives!’

‘And the great victory we have this day achieved!’ added Enrique Canazilla. ‘His wise counsel, throughout this expedition, I have strenuously adhered to!’

‘By San Cristobal!’ exclaimed Alvorado. ‘He is the prince of schemers! With such an one, I would undertake the conquest of a nation!’

‘For his gallantry, I have one word to say,’ replied Isabella, with a faint blush upon her fair cheek. ‘He bore me in his arms from the Plaza to the palace!’

‘And I’d dew the same thing agin under the particular circumstances of the case! That’s the way we dew up things in the land o’ steady habits.—Now, Ginerl, if you have got any bizness for this ere child, I’ll dew it as cheap as any other live Yankee! I shan’t charge but seven-and-six a day, vittles and lodging included! I come out here to make a spec and I’ll be darn’d if I don’t dew it!’

‘You shall be amply provided for,’ replied Cascara.

In less than one year after the triumph of the insurgents in the capital of Mexico, the complete Revolution of the Republic was effected.—Santa Anna, was captured in attempting to escape, and now awaits his trial in one of the dungeons of the prison at Perote.

Our hero, Don Alvorado Nunez, espoused the beauteous Isabella but a few months since, and he now holds a high office in the new government. His father-in-law and his brave lieutenant, Enrique Canazilla, also hold responsible stations.

Zeb Short is still in Mexico! The General kept his promise, and he is now the richest and happiest Yankee in the Republic! Whether he has relinquished his intention of investing Miss Nancy Buttercup with the shorter and less euphonious appellation of Mrs. Zeb Short, or bestow it upon some black-eyed Señorita of the capital, we are unable to inform our readers!

In conclusion, we would state that a valuable tiara of diamonds was found among the valuables at the government palace, which was identified by the grandee and his daughter, as the one that had been taken by the bandits from the Señora de Cascara, and also recognized by Nunez to be the same he had seen in the Brigands’ Cave. The treasures of this remarkable grotto were removed by Canazilla to the capital soon after the flight of Santa Anna; and placed in possession of the new government.

Our tale is now complete. Patient reader, *au revoir!*











